

# THE INVESTIGATORS in

## *THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING TREASURE*





in

**THE MYSTERY  
OF THE  
MISSING TREASURE**

Jupiter, Pete and Bob are in Northern California for a holiday in the tranquil coastal town of Sandfield. There they meet a descendent of a famous resident and learn of the possibility of a gold treasure from a ship that sank off the coast some fifty years ago. Interestingly, the gold is supposedly taken from the wreck of the *Brother Jonathan*—a famous paddle steamer that sank in 1865. Very soon, The Three Investigators find themselves scrambling, not only to recover the missing treasure, but to uncover a mystery from more than a hundred years ago.

The Three Investigators  
in  
The Mystery of the Missing Treasure

*Original German text by  
André Marx*

*Based on characters created by  
Robert Arthur*

*Translated, adapted, and edited from:*

*Die drei ???: Das versunkene Schiff*

*(The Three ???: The Sunken Ship)*

*by*

*André Marx*

*(1995, 2014)*

*Cover art by*

*Silvia Christoph*

*(2021-12-04)*

## **Contents**

- 1. Rainy Holidays**
- 2. The Legend of Geoffrey Young**
- 3. Under Water**
- 4. Mission Cut Short**
- 5. The Big Resort**
- 6. Africa?**
- 7. Africa!**
- 8. Sharks and Harpoons**
- 9. Good Mr Ellis**
- 10. Gold Fever**
- 11. Surveillance**
- 12. G.Y.**
- 13. A Bunch of Fools**
- 14. Drenched in Sweat**
- 15. Rescue Mission**
- 16. Countdown!**
- 17. Well Hidden in the Depths**
- 18. The Gold Rush Ends**

## 1. Rainy Holidays

Thick raindrops slapped against the window and blurred the world outside. There were huge puddles on the main street of Sandfield. No one was on the road.

"If it keeps raining like this, it's going to be a very sad holiday," Pete murmured, resting his chin on his right hand and looking up at the cloudy sky. It was pouring with rain, and the mere sight of that made Pete shiver, even though it was relatively warm inside 'Brother Jonathan'—the small café where The Three Investigators were in.

"Oh, come on," Jupiter objected. "We're not going to let this rain spoil our holiday. We can read, play chess, do mathematical puzzles..."

"Then I'll be bored to death," Pete said. "I'd rather sit by the window and watch the rain."

"It won't be that bad," Bob said. "I think there are plenty of things to do in this nice little town, even in this rainy weather—like go to the museum or—"

"Spare me," Pete begged.

"—Or we can take a trip to Redwood National Park to see the redwoods."

"In the rain? Great idea, Bob."

The three boys had been invited by Ford Follows, an old journalist colleague and friend of Bob's father, to spend part of their holiday in Sandfield, a tranquil coastal town in northern California.

Sandfield was a popular tourist destination with its picturesque bay, wide sandy beach and old Victorian houses. Mr Follows owned two small cottages for rental to holiday-makers and that served as a sideline to his job at the *Times-Standard* newspaper. This week, however, a guest couldn't make it and Mr Follows had offered the cottage to the three boys for free.

Thrilled by the idea of spending a week lazing on the beach, swimming and fishing, The Three Investigators had packed their bags and driven to Sandfield in Pete's car. Only Jupiter had initially pondered the sense of a holiday at the coast, because after all they had sun, beach and sea at home in Rocky Beach. However, he was eventually convinced by his friends' argument that this way they could escape Aunt Mathilda and her never-ending work around The Jones Salvage Yard.

As it was, nothing had come of sun, beach and sea so far. They had been here since yesterday and it had not stopped raining for a second. The weather forecast did not bode well either.

"Apart from the rain, nothing else is happening outside," Pete muttered sullenly. "Nothing. Zero. Not a person on the street."

"Sandfield lives from tourism," Jupiter said in a matter-of-fact manner, paying no attention to Pete's bad mood. "Since it has been raining for days, the hotels and holiday homes are empty."

"Even the souvenir shop across the street is closed," Pete remarked. By now his chin was resting on the table top. "... And so is the restaurant—even when it is lunchtime now."

He looked around the café. It was furnished in a cosy fisherman's cottage style. The wood of the furniture was dark and cracked. A fishing net hung under the ceiling, and on the walls were framed copper plate engravings and black-and-white photographs of ships and

boats. There was also a large bookshelf on the wall. However, the fine layer of dust suggested that it had not been paid attention to for a long time. Apart from them, an elderly gentleman was sitting at a table by the window, reading the newspaper and drinking coffee.

The waitress, a girl with full, dark curls who was only a little older than the three of them, wiped across the long-clean counter for the tenth time. She had squinted over at them a few times. Now she came over to them. "Can I get you anything else?"

"No, thank you," Pete replied, bored, "but you could answer us one question. What do you do in Sandfield when it rains all day like this?"

"Well, there's not much here. Most visitors just enjoy the peace and nature. They sit on the beach and look at the sea. For those who live here... well, they just work—like me. I'm Amanda, by the way—Amanda Ellis. My uncle owns this café. In the holidays, I work here to earn some extra money."

"I'm Pete, and this is Bob and Jupiter," Pete introduced them.

Amanda nodded. "Where do you live in Sandfield?"

"At the south end of the bay, just by the dunes," Jupiter replied. "The cottage belongs to Mr Follows."

Amanda nodded knowingly. "I know him well... so do most of the people here." She looked embarrassed that her town was so small. "A lot of people still have a little beach house that they rent out... or a guest room... or they own a restaurant or a kiosk. However, this year the tourists are staying away... they'd rather go south—to Santa Barbara, Santa Monica and so on, where the sun is almost always shining. It's been like that for weeks now."

"We're sorry about that, Amanda," Bob said.

"It's especially bad for my uncle," Amanda continued. "He owns two hotels and several houses here in Sandfield. He earns exclusively from tourism and is already desperate."

A snorting sound reached them. The four turned around. The man sitting alone at the window had laughed.

"Did you want to say something, Mr Friedman?" asked Amanda challengingly.

Mr Friedman seemed to wrestle with himself for a moment, then his need to share won out. "If anyone is not suffering from the bad season, it's your uncle."

"That's not true," Amanda said. "If his houses are empty, he loses a lot of money."

"But to lose a lot of money, you have to have a lot of money first," Mr Friedman commented. "So come to think of what you just said, sure, then your uncle suffers."

When Amanda turned back to The Three Investigators, her smile visibly cost her effort. "Anyway, I hope you're not bored despite the weather in Sandfield. You're welcome to drop by anytime."

"It has just stopped raining," Jupiter remarked.

"Then let's get going before we get stuck here," Pete said. "I want to go to the beach... even if we only walk up and down once. If I sit around anywhere much longer, I'll freak out. No offence, Amanda."

"It's okay."

They settled the bill and left the Brother Jonathan café.

After crossing the main road, they followed a narrow footpath towards the beach. They reached the top of a weathered wooden staircase that led down to the sea. In the distance, waves rolled past black rocks and small islands onto the wet beach.

At the foot of the stairs stood an old wooden building. At first glance, it looked abandoned, for it was slightly warped and the paint was peeling. Pete and Bob suspected it might be a beach café that had been abandoned decades ago. However Jupiter pointed to a sign that was attached to a decaying wooden pillar in front of the building:



*BOAT HIRE—JO HILTON*

*BOATS, KAYAKS, SURFBOARDS, DIVING EQUIPMENT*

“Goodness!” said Pete. “I thought this shack was a ruin... but it’s truly a boat rental shop! Hey, there’s diving equipment for hire too. How about some underwater excursions? At least then we won’t notice it’s raining.”

Jupiter was less than enthusiastic, Bob shrugged dispassionately, but Pete was so taken with the prospect of being able to do some kind of physical activity that he immediately took the initiative. “Come on, let’s go down and ask!”

They descended the wooden stairs, which creaked untrustingly under their weight. Behind the shop were some rowing boats, and leaning against the back wall were plastic kayaks. Further down the beach, near the surf line, were more boats. Next to them were surfboards chained to wooden pillars.

The shop itself had a few small windows, but the sand and salty air had almost blinded the panes. Nevertheless, the boys could still see the diving goggles and fins on display on the shelves.

The door creaked audibly as The Three Investigators entered. The shop consisted essentially of a single large customer area, with a small office at the back. The walls were lined with warped shelves reaching up to the ceiling, crammed with everything needed in and on the water—goggles, snorkels, life jackets, wetsuits of all shapes and sizes, waterproof shoes, fins, surfboard wax, fishing rods, oars. Despite the dilapidated state of the shop, the displayed items were all new and first class, as Pete noted with an expert eye.

There was a rumbling in the small office and someone pushed out of the doorway on an old desk chair from which the upholstery was already spilling out.

It was a young and athletic-looking woman who wore a washed-out black hoodie and had her dark hair carelessly tied up.

“Hello, what can I do for you?” she asked when she saw The Three Investigators.

“We just happened to come across your shop and were wondering if we could rent diving equipment today or in the next few days.”

She looked at them in surprise. “You are the first visitors this season to ask for diving equipment. Are you actually going to venture out to sea in this weather?” As if to underline her words, at that very moment, a violent gust rattled the shop and the rain hammered violently against the windows.

“He wants to,” Jupiter said, pointing at Pete. “At most, we can be persuaded.”

“All right. Do you have a diving licence?”

Pete nodded.

“When and where have you ever—”

At that moment, the door flew open. A completely drenched, adventurous-looking man came stumbling in, bringing a torrent of rain with him. He wore a black, dripping mackintosh and had pulled the hood deep into his face, which was barely visible under an unkempt full beard. Wildly, he stared at the woman from deep-set eyes. He ignored The Three Investigators.

“Quick, Jo! I need diving equipment! And a boat! My great-uncle’s ship has resurfaced... and with it the treasure!”

## 2. The Legend of Geoffrey Young

“Calm down!” Jo rose from her chair and stepped towards the man. “Won’t you sit down so that I can attend to my other customers first and then—”

“My goodness, Jo, aren’t you listening to me?” the man interrupted her impatiently. “You won’t believe what happened. I was just on my way home, walking through the dunes and who do I see? Eric Ellis, just looking—”

The man faltered, turned his head and looked at Jupiter, Pete and Bob. Apparently he was only now fully aware of the fact that Jo Hilton really did have customers.

Jupiter wondered how old the man might be. The beard, the shaggy hair and the rest of his wild appearance made it difficult to estimate. Only a few single grey hairs crossed the dark full beard.

“Best we talk outside,” he said abruptly and started to pull Jo towards the door.

However, she resisted and said: “Goodness, Steve, are you all right? You come bursting in here yelling—” She waved it off. “Just bear with me for a moment. I’ll finish serving my customers.” She turned back to The Three Investigators. “So, boys, when do you want to go? Today, or do you want to make an appointment for the next few days? Then we could discuss everything else later.”

However, Jupiter had long forgotten about the dive. He turned to the man called Steve and said: “Forgive me, sir, for butting in. You spoke of a treasure that had resurfaced. Can you tell us more about it?”

Bob and Pete glanced furtively at each other. Secretly, they admired Jupiter. They would never have had the courage to ask this question so directly themselves for the bearded man looked so fierce that it was enough to scare them.

For seconds, the man stared at Jupiter, half frowning, half incredulous. “That’s none of your business, boy!”

“You’re certainly right, it’s none of my business,” Jupiter agreed with him, “but my colleagues and I have a certain professional interest in things that disappear and reappear... and that could be to your advantage. May I give you our card?” Jupiter took out two copies of their business card from the inside pocket of his rain jacket and handed it to Jo and the man. The card said:



The man was speechless with amazement. “What am I supposed to do with this kid stuff?”

"It occurred to me that you might need the help of investigators," Jupiter continued, "for example, if you want to find something lost. We have become experts at that over time, but of course I don't know if I'm assessing your situation correctly. Therefore, I would like to listen to your story first."

"You talk too much, boy!"

That's when the shop owner intervened: "Take it easy, Steve. These three are my customers and this is my shop, understand? Behave yourself or you're out."

Seeing that Steve was more likely to get angrier, she put a hand on his wet shoulder reassuringly. "They're just teenage tourists spending a few days in Sandfield. Why don't you tell them your great-uncle's story? They can't do you any harm, can they?"

He looked at the three disparagingly, then laughed harshly. "No, they can't. All right, then. I'll tell you the story... but you have Jo to thank for that, just so you know."

The Three Investigators nodded silently. It was better not to say anything and let him do the talking.

"I'll make us some tea meanwhile," Jo said and went into the office, where she started fiddling with a small sink next to which there was a kettle.

"My name is Steve Young," the man began. "I live up there on the cliff. My family has lived in Sandfield since the town was founded. My great-uncle Geoffrey was a grandson of the founding fathers. He was born on the night of the Great San Francisco Earthquake, and he remains a legend to this day. He was a glorious adventurer, a great role model for all the residents of Sandfield, oh, what am I saying—for all of Northern California! He won the great cliff climb at Death Rock three times in a row, and once he even killed a shark with his bare hands when he was attacked while swimming!"

Jo, who was pouring the tea next door, cleared her throat audibly. "He was also a gambler, a loud-mouth, and a criminal."

"Criminal?" sneered Steve. "He was selling alcohol by doing humanity a service... Yeah, sure, it was illegal at that time. So what? He was revered for it in Sandfield to this day! That's not criminal!"

"The authorities didn't see it that way."

"That's true, though. They drove him to his death—the hero of Sandfield." Steve Young looked angrily at The Three Investigators as if they were responsible for his great-uncle's death, but they hadn't even heard the whole story yet.

Jupiter cleared his throat carefully. "And the... er... treasure?"

"Well, that one went down with him!"

"Steve," Jo said, rejoining them with five cups on a tray full of tea stains. "You'll have to tell the story in the right order for the boys to understand."

Steve sighed impatiently. "The police were after my great-uncle because of the illegal alcohol bar he was running. They wanted to arrest him but he got a tip-off and just had time to stash his money and set sail on his ship, the *Eureka*. He wanted to get away, but it was stormy that night, and the waters off the coast of Sandfield were treacherous. The ship ran onto one of the many rocks and sank.

"Geoffrey Young managed to save himself ashore, but he had been in the water for hours as the ebb tide kept pulling him out. The long time in the icy water gave him pneumonia, from which he died a little later. On his deathbed, he spoke of a treasure that was said to have been on board his ship—the treasure of the *Brother Jonathan*."

Jo interrupted Steve Young. "Supposedly that's what he said, but a lot of people believe that he was actually talking about something completely different—that he, already half

dying, was talking about the *Brother Jonathan* disaster, which had been very similar and where there really had been a treasure.”

“Brother Jonathan?” repeated Pete. “That’s the name of the café where we were at earlier.”

Jo nodded. “Named after a famous paddle steamer that sank off the coast of Crescent City in 1865, not far from here.”

“I remember,” Bob said.

“You remember something from 1865?” Pete grinned. “Bob, you’re doing very well—all credit to you!”

“I remember reading something about that accident,” Bob explained. “It was the deadliest shipwreck on the Pacific Coast up to that time. Wasn’t the wreck found some years back?”

“Yes, in 1993,” Jo said, “and three years later, the gold treasure was recovered.”

“Gold treasure?” Pete listened up.

“Yes, there was a considerable amount of gold on board the *Brother Jonathan*,” Bob explained. “It was gold to be shipped further north, and... uh... actually, I can’t remember what were they for...” Bob turned to Jo questioningly.

“A portion of the gold were meant as treaty payments from the government to Indian tribes. There were also gold consignments of financial companies, and private gold of the passengers. Although the wreck was searched for immediately after the accident, the storms, rocky outcrops, and underwater currents prevented it from being found for over a hundred years. Eventually, with modern recovery methods, the ship could be found.

“Until then, half of Sandfield had believed that Geoffrey Young had secretly dived for the treasure and found it—and that the gold had then sunk a second time, this time with Geoffrey’s ship, the *Eureka*.”

“But if the treasure was recovered in 1996, that can’t be right,” Jupiter said.

“Exactly,” Jo confirmed, looking at Steve Young. “That can’t be right.”

Steve Young then took the floor: “Let me tell you this—the gold that was recovered in 1996 was only a small portion of the treasure—estimated to be about a fifth of it. The far greater portion was never found, and I have reasons to believe that that is because my great-uncle had found it earlier—some fifty years ago.”

Jo frowned. “I don’t know, Steve. What really happened the night your great-uncle crashed is beyond anyone’s knowledge. The problem with a legendary person is that legends develop quickly.”

“Has the wreck of the *Eureka* ever been found?” Jupiter enquired.

“No,” said Jo.

“Yes!” objected Steve Young. “That’s what I’m talking about a while ago. Doesn’t anyone listen to me here? It’s been found, and so has the treasure! And that’s why I need diving equipment right now!”

“But Steve, what makes you think that—”

“I overheard Eric Ellis walking home through the dunes earlier.”

“The man who owns some houses and hotels here?” Pete had remembered the name of Amanda’s uncle.

“That’s the one. He was standing on the cliff with a man I didn’t know—some greasy guy with a dark ponytail down to his butt. They were looking out to the sea and talking to each other. Ellis seemed annoyed, and when he does something annoying, it makes me curious.

“Since they hadn’t seen me, I just stopped behind a dune and listened. They were talking about a wreck lying on the seabed just offshore, and that they were going to salvage it, or

rather its cargo. Ellis was annoyed because it hadn't been found yet and he was going to pay for the salvage, and the greasy guy demanded even more money because he needed extra helpers."

Jupiter frowned. "And what makes you think they were talking about your great-uncle's ship?"

"Because they said so, wise guy!" Mr Young snapped. "They were talking about the *Eureka*—that's exactly what I heard. Besides, it all adds up—Ellis is a money-grubbing sack. He put one and one together and came to the same conclusion as I did—that Geoffrey Young must have found the rest of the treasure back then, and it is still lying at the bottom of the sea in the belly of the *Eureka*. If you could just find the wreck of the *Eureka*, you could just grab it."

Steve Young's expression darkened. "And now he has succeeded! But the treasure is mine! I am the only living descendant of Geoffrey Young. Ellis has no right to the gold at all. So it's best if I just beat him to it and find the treasure first. Anyway, give me some diving equipment now, Jo!"

Jo Hilton sighed: "Don't do this the wrong way, Steve, as I think it's all a bit hasty. You don't even know if you're right. What you think you overheard—"

"Think?" Steve Young interrupted her.

"... Can mean all sorts of things," Jo continued unperturbed, "and where do you want to start looking? You don't have the slightest clue! And do you even have a diving licence?"

"Diving licence?" growled Steve Young contemptuously. "Nobody needs one of those."

"Then how will you—"

"Put the oxygen bottle on your back, put on the goggles and off you go. There's not much to know! After all, I don't have a driving licence either and I still drive a car."

Pete held a hand over his mouth to keep from laughing.

"It's called a scuba tank and it is filled with compressed air," Jo corrected the man angrily. "You don't know what you're talking about, Steve. You and diving, that would be life-threatening! I'm not going to give you any equipment. Forget it!"

"Jo, you can't... Should I leave the treasure to Ellis without a fight? Never!" A dangerous glare had entered Young's dark eyes.

"Excuse me," Jupiter spoke up, "but we can dive."

Steve Young stared at him and remained silent.

"And we have, as already mentioned, some experience in recovering lost things," Jupiter added. "If you would give us the assignment, we could set out to find the sunken ship."

"To claw the treasure for yourselves, huh?" asked Young belligerently.

Jupiter shook his head slowly. He had no intention of responding to Young's provocations. "No. We are investigators. We're not in it for personal gain, we just want to solve mysteries and uncover secrets."

Steve Young stroked his shaggy beard and examined the three of them closely. Then he looked at Jo questioningly.

"You don't have to look at me like that," Jo said. "I only rent equipment here. I have nothing to do with any treasure."

Steve Young turned to The Three Investigators and said: "All right. You have the assignment." He threatened with his index finger. "But you better not fool me! If you steal just one gold coin from me—"

"We'll have to find them first," Bob quipped, as Young was getting on his nerves with his mistrust.

“Now that that’s settled, we can finally get down to business,” Jupiter said with a determined expression. “I already have a plan.”

Pete laughed. “That’s a new record, Juve. We’ve had a new case for three seconds and you already have a plan. I think it took you eight seconds the last time. Let me guess—you know where the gold coins are, how Mr Ellis intends to get them, and what size of shoe his partner wears.”

“You flatter me, Pete. No, I don’t know where the gold coins are, but at least I have an idea how we can proceed,” Jupiter said and then turned to the bearded man. “Mr Young, you said your great-uncle’s ship sank because it hit a rock. It would be good if we could find out what shoals might have been responsible for that accident.” He looked at Jo. “Do you happen to have a map of this stretch of coast, Miss Hilton? Then we’ll know where to start our search.”

“Please call me Jo. But I’m sorry, nautical charts are about the only thing I don’t have in my shop.”

“I have a map like that!” exclaimed Young. “It’s in a box where I keep old heirlooms. I think it even came from my great-uncle!”

“Can you get the map? We’ll take care of the diving equipment in the meantime.”

“All right.” Steve Young was at the door with three big steps and left the shop.

Jo Hilton looked at the three thoughtfully. Then she sighed. “I don’t know, guys. This whole story seems very adventurous to me.”

“Does that mean you don’t want to rent us the equipment after all?” asked Pete, startled.

“Yes, I do... but I want to warn you. Steve Young is... well... maybe a bit hasty with what he believes and says. He’s a nice guy, but a bit cranky. He lives up there in his house on the cliff all by himself and deals with all sorts of crazy stuff... Actually, nobody really knows what he does. I like him, but you should be careful not to take him too seriously. The treasure thing might turn out to be a big hoax.”

“Thanks for the warning, Jo,” Jupiter said with a smile. “We’ve already realized that Mr Young’s comments should be taken with a grain of salt. Don’t worry, we don’t expect to recover any gold treasure... but what have we got to lose?”

“A few hours of yawning boredom,” said Pete. “I’d rather have a little diving adventure!”

Jo grinned. “You’re right about that, though. In that sense... I’ve just decided to come along! I wouldn’t like to let you boys go out to sea alone in this weather. Geoffrey Young’s ship sank for a reason. The reefs are dangerous... but I know my way around.”

“That would be great, of course,” Juve said, “so let’s not waste time!”

### 3. Under Water

While The Three Investigators picked out the appropriate wetsuits, masks and lead weights with Jo's help, Pete said: "You're a diver yourself, Jo. Don't you find it strange that no one has ever found the wreck of the *Eureka* by chance?"

Jo shook her head. "There's not much to see underwater here in the north. We don't have corals or colourful fish, plus the sea is pretty murky. Few people go diving, and if they do, it's just off the coast by the rocks."

When they had gathered their equipment, Steve Young returned. This time he left smaller puddles on the wooden floor. The rain had diminished to a drizzle. Determined, he strode into Jo's small office. There he carelessly pushed aside everything on the desk and spread out the map he had brought with him.

"Here," he said, jabbing his finger at the paper. "Here we are..."

The Three Investigators joined him and bent over the nautical chart with interest.

"That's quite a lot of rocks," Pete noted.

"The rocks you can see are less a problem than the ones just below the surface," Jupiter said, pointing to half a dozen places where the shoals were marked. "Geoffrey Young's ship could have capsized in any of these places. However, Jo just told us that the few recreational divers who are out in the bay stay around the rocks. None of them have discovered the wreck in the last few decades. So I guess your great-uncle made it out a bit further... and there—this group of rocks could be responsible for a wreck." His finger tapped a reef-lined passage a distance away out. "Maybe he tried to steer out to sea through here, but the storm pushed the ship against a rock."

Bob and Pete nodded. "Could have been like that," Bob said.

"This is a dangerous spot," Young agreed with them. "Today it is marked with buoys."

"All the better for us," Pete thought. "Then we'll find them right away."

Twenty minutes later, they were ready to go. The Three Investigators had put on their diving suits and brought the equipment on board Jo's small motorboat. Jo was also wearing a wetsuit. She locked up her shop and together they went down to the water.

Joining forces, they pushed the boat across the wet sand and jumped aboard. Jo started the engine and steered the boat through the drizzle towards the grey horizon.

"What about your shop?" asked Pete loudly, trying to drown out the wind and the engine noise.

Jo laughed. "Nobody comes anyway. Nobody rents a boat in this weather. Last week there were still a few brave surfers. However, on Wednesday, we had a storm that even drove away my most fearless customers. In the past few days, I was just sitting in the shop catching up on the accounts."

"Does Mr Ellis own a boat and diving equipment?" Jupiter enquired, "or would he have to come to you to rent both?"

"Most people in Sandfield have a boat. Mr Ellis certainly does."

Young laughed bitterly. "And if he doesn't own any diving equipment, he'll just buy some. That's no problem for Ellis."

“What about the diving itself?” Bob asked.

“If he needs to, he’ll go diving himself... else he gets someone to do it. Ellis pays good money for whatever he wants. It’s always been that way, but not with me! Not with me!”

They steered past jagged rocks on which some sea lions were lying and looking at them. Jo drove in a wide arc around them so as not to disturb the animals.

“I think Jupe in a wetsuit would fit well with the sea lions,” Pete remarked. “Look, Jupe, they’re waving at you!” Bob let off a giggle while Jupiter pretended not to have heard that remark.

Slowly it was getting uncomfortably cold in the diving suits. Luckily there were blankets on board in waterproof boxes under the seats, which The Three Investigators now wrapped themselves in.

By now they could see the whole of Sandfield. The crescent-shaped bay lay deserted. Jo’s boat rental shop was just a small brown speck in front of the rain-dark cliff that almost completely enclosed the bay. To the south, the cliff flattened out and merged into a dune landscape. Above it, the colourful wooden houses of Sandfield could be seen. Even further south was the small fishing harbour.

“Look, there’s the cottage we are staying in,” Bob said, pointing to a small building between the dunes.

“And there’s mine.” Steve Young pointed to a stone cottage built frighteningly close to the edge of the northern cliff. From its window, he could probably spit into the sea. “Behind it on the hill, half hidden in the woods, is the house of Eric Ellis...” he continued, “but only the roof of this building is visible from here, the rest is hidden behind conifers.”

Finally they reached the buoys marking the passage between the shoals. Jo headed for one of them and switched off the engine. “Here we are. Who wants to go down first?”

“Me!” Pete immediately spoke up. He was the most athletic of The Three Investigators, and he had been sitting idle far too long for his liking.

“Then I will come with you,” Jo said.

For a moment, Pete was not very enthusiastic. He felt as if Jo didn’t trust him with anything. Of course, one always had to dive in pairs so as not to take any risks... but why couldn’t Bob go instead? Quietly, he swallowed his annoyance. After all, it was Jo’s boat and her equipment that she was lending them for free. There was little he could say against her wanting to go along on the first dive.

They strapped on their scuba tanks, did a final safety check, and squatted on the edge of the boat with their backs to the water.

“We’ll hold the fort up here,” Jupiter promised. “Good luck! And don’t come back up without some gold coins!”

Pete pressed the diving mask onto his face, put the mouthpiece between his lips and dropped backwards into the water. Jo followed him a moment later.

Bubbles rose and for a few seconds, the silhouettes of the two were still visible. Then they disappeared into the depths.

Now Bob dared to ask what he had not wanted to ask while Pete was on board. “Mr Young, earlier you said something about a shark attacking your great-uncle. Was that just a story or are there really sharks in these waters?”

“Of course there are,” Young growled sullenly, as if Bob had asked a very stupid question. “There are sharks almost everywhere in the world... and the fact that my great-uncle once killed one with his bare hands isn’t a story either—it’s the truth.” But when he saw Bob turn pale, he suddenly started laughing. “Pete won’t get bitten. After all, there are enough sea lions out there. The sharks like them better.”



“It’s a good thing Pete doesn’t know that,” Jupiter said. “He would have been out of the water faster than he jumped in.”

As the sun was not shining, the light only reached a few metres under water. Then it got so dark that Pete and Jo had to switch on their lamps. The seabed here was about thirty metres below the surface, and on the way down Pete did the pressure equalization technique to get rid of the unpleasant feeling in his ears.

They came together at the concrete block where the floating buoy was moored. Using hand signals, Jo suggested that they swim northwards a few metres apart. Pete nodded and gave her the ‘okay’ sign.

The water was murky and the light from the lamps only reached a few metres. Jo’s lamp was no more than a pale firefly floating through the water somewhere to Pete’s right.

The Second Investigator found it difficult to even get a sense of how fast or far he was going, for below him was only grey sand, which his fins kicked up in clouds when he sank too low. Soon, the first large rocks appeared in the cone of light from his lamp. It was the reef.

Jo came swimming over to him and raised a thumb—they were where they wanted to be. Pete shone his light upwards. Some of the rocks reached just below the surface of the water. He imagined how easily a ship that didn’t know the course could ram the sharp rocky points here and get damaged.

They began the search. Pete swam around among the rocks and shone his lamp everywhere. The reef was a real little labyrinth. Then he spotted some strange shapes at the edge of his field of vision, silhouetted against the rocks. Had he found what he was looking for? He swam quite a distance before the strange shapes emerged more clearly from the murky water.

However, it was just another rock formation. The rock was brighter and had reflected the light of his lamp better, which was why he had been able to see the rocks at a greater distance.

Pete was disappointed. Slowly it dawned on him the futility of this whole mission. Trying to find a wreck down here was almost hopeless if they didn’t have an exact position. Visibility was far too low, the seabed a huge expanse, and if he swam past the wreck at a distance of only ten metres, the chances were good that he would miss it.

Pete swam once around the group of rocks, but there was nothing exciting to discover. He decided to return to Jo in order to decide on how to proceed. He looked around, but there was nothing to be seen of his companion—not even the glow of her lamp. Confused, the Second Investigator wondered which direction he had come from.

He swam in circles twice, but it didn’t help—he had lost his bearings. Pete glanced at his pressure gauge. He didn’t have too much time left before he had to return to the surface. Besides, while ascending, he still had to allow air for a safety stop of at least three minutes to prevent decompression sickness.

Pete swam slowly and leisurely along the rocks upwards in the direction where he thought the boat was. Suddenly, the light of his lamp caught something large that was moving.

It was something huge! Pete froze in shock and almost dropped his lamp. It was a shark—a gigantic shark! Huge and dark, it ploughed through the water with slow, steady movements, and seemed unstoppable—like a submarine.

Pete's first impulse was to surface as quickly as possible, but that could be life-threatening! So he swam hastily towards the nearest rock and hid behind it. He did not take his eyes off the shark.

Then the animal changed direction. It swam directly towards Pete. And slowly, very slowly, it opened its gigantic mouth!

#### 4. Mission Cut Short

The surface of the water bubbled, which Bob recognized as someone surfacing. It was Jo.

“Well, found anything?” asked Bob expectantly.

“No—not found but lost,” Jo gasped after spitting out her mouthpiece. “I’ve lost track of Pete down there. Has he turned up yet?”

“No,” Bob replied.

“Darn!” Jo exclaimed. “I shouldn’t have let him swim so far away. The visibility is miserable!”

“Don’t worry, Jo,” Jupiter tried to reassure her. “Pete is an experienced diver. Nothing will have happened to him. Maybe he spotted something and that’s why he’s still down there. How much air does he have left?”

“I can’t judge that. Less than me, I guess, because he is bigger and consumes more. Experienced diver or not—something can always happen. He shouldn’t be down there alone.” Jo wrestled with herself. “I’ll go down again and look for him.”

But then a voice came to them. Everyone turned around. A figure was rowing wildly with his arms. Pete! He had surfaced about fifty metres away from the buoy.

“Jupe!” he shouted excitedly, but he was so far away that they hardly understood anything else.

“The best thing we can do is steer the boat towards him,” Bob suggested.

Jupiter and Bob helped Jo aboard while Steve Young started the engine. Pete was already swimming towards them.

Suddenly a dark shadow emerged from the water.

“Oh, my goodness!” cried Bob. “A shark! That’s the dorsal fin of a shark! That critter is huge!”

The fin ploughed right between the boat and Pete from left to right through the surface of the water.

Pete had also spotted the shark. He froze. His gaze wandered back and forth in panic between the dorsal fin and the boat. Slowly, the fin disappeared into the water. For a moment, the huge black outline of the animal could still be made out, then they saw it no more.

“Hurry up, Steve!” urged Jo. “Go full speed!”

Young let the engine roar and a few seconds later, they had reached Pete.

The Second Investigator gasped frantically. “Help me out, help me out!”

With their combined strength, they pulled Pete on board. First he tore the heavy scuba tank off his back. “Oh goodness! Did you see it?”

“We did,” Jupiter said.

“It appeared out of nowhere and came straight at me!” gasped Pete hastily. He swallowed. “I thought I was done for.”

“Did you show up right away?” asked Jo, startled.

“No, that was the problem! I had to make the safety stop first. I kept close to a rock so the shark wouldn’t surprise me from behind. That was the longest three minutes of my life! Most of the time I didn’t see it at all. I was afraid that I would attract it with my lamp, but when I turned it off for a moment, I didn’t see anything at all, which was even worse.”

“What kind of shark was it anyway?” Jupiter wanted to know.

“My goodness, Jupe, I don’t know. It doesn’t matter what kind of shark it was—it was huge! A monster! ... And it had a huge mouth as well. It was horrible!” Pete pulled his arms as far apart as he could. “It could have swallowed me whole!”

“Was it going to attack you?” Jupiter asked.

“Attack? ... I don’t know. No, not really. I don’t know, Jupe. It was just there, that’s enough! Anyway, I’m never going in the water again—you can bet your life on that.”

“Understandable,” Bob said sympathetically.

“It could have been a great white shark,” Young said.

“What?” Pete exclaimed.

“Because of the sea lions. They are a favourite meal of great white sharks... but there’s a simple way for divers not to get attacked.”

“And what would that be?” asked Pete.

“You swim towards the shark.”

“Excuse me?”

“Then the shark realizes that you are not prey, because a prey animal would naturally take flight.”

Pete was so speechless that for a moment he could only gasp. Then he exclaimed: “That’s a great tip, Mr Young, thank you very much! I’ll go down again right away, now that I know that practically nothing at all can happen to me in shark-infested waters if I just swim towards the sharks!”

Steve Young looked completely unmoved. “My great-uncle once killed a shark—”

“Yeah, I know... killed it with his bare hands,” Pete interrupted him. “You already told us that.”

Young looked at Bob and Jupiter. “Since your friend is chickening out—do you want to go down?”

“Us?” asked Bob, startled, looking around as if there were a bunch of other people on board.

“No one goes down anymore,” Jo said firmly. “Really, Steve, how can you ask that question! We’re turning back, and we’re going now. Pete is shivering all over, he needs to get warm quickly.” She took the wheel herself and steered the boat back to shore.

At first, no one spoke a word. Pete stared at the floor and shivered silently. Jupiter began to pinch his lower lip. Finally, when they were already at the sea lion rocks, he said: “Just diving off like that was a crazy idea. We need much more information about the possible location where the *Eureka* might have sunk before we dive next time.”

“You want to dive again?” asked Pete in shock. “Are you crazy? What about the shark?”

“Sure, there was a shark down there, Pete,” Jupiter replied calmly. “That doesn’t mean there are hundreds of sharks down there just waiting for us to get into the water. Besides, it was quite harmless after all.”

“Harmless?”

“Mr Young is right, sharks don’t target humans. Basically, they are harmless to us if we behave properly. Besides, how are you going to find a sunken ship without diving?”

“I don’t want to find a sunken ship, Jupe. You can find it. You can dive as often as you like—several times a day if you like, but I’m staying up there!”

The last part of the return journey was in silence.

## 5. The Big Resort

Pete spent the rest of the afternoon in bed. The encounter with the shark exhausted him completely. Moreover, the cold that had crept into his body was difficult to dispel, and he didn't feel much like having debates about sharks with Jupiter. He just wanted his peace and quiet. Fortunately, everyone had their own bedroom in the holiday cottage, from which the soothing sound of the sea could be heard in the distance.

Bob stopped by the Brother Jonathan café again and bought three hot cocoas to go. He told Amanda about their exciting adventure and Pete's shark encounter. She wanted to know everything in detail and Bob eventually had to pull himself loose before the cocoa got cold.

By the evening, tempers had calmed down. Jupiter and Bob had gone to great lengths to cook something delicious in the little kitchen. In the end they only had spaghetti with tomato sauce, but Pete was hungry and grateful. Eventually, they gobbled everything down to the last blob.

They had just finished eating when there was an unexpected knock at the door. It was Mr Follows, Bob's father's friend who owned the cottage. He was a tall, lean man with a narrow face, a high forehead and glasses that made his eyes look much smaller.

"I just wanted to say hello and find out how you did on your first day at Sandfield."

"Great," said Bob. "A lot has already happened. Anyway, we were only bored for a very short time."

"I'm glad to hear that! What happened that was so exciting?"

The Three Investigators took turns telling their host about their encounter with Steve Young, the treasure, the dive and the shark.

When they had finished, Mr Follows nodded enthusiastically. "A great story! Too bad I wasn't there."

"Be glad," Pete said.

"Do you think there is any truth in it?" asked Bob. "Mr Young is convinced, Miss Hilton is rather sceptical, and we have a hard time getting historical information. Do you think it's possible that there really is a shipwreck out there with treasure on board?"

Mr Follows smiled. "Your father has already told me that I must be prepared to be drawn into investigative questionings at any time when dealing with you three. It is likely that the wreck of the *Eureka* lies at the bottom of the sea near the coast, but whether this legendary treasure actually exists... I hate to disappoint you, boys, but I don't believe it."

"And why not?" asked Bob, trying not to let his disappointment show.

"Geoffrey Young was a colourful personality, and he was well-known beyond the borders of Sandfield during his lifetime. He often told adventurous stories. Somehow, he always seemed to have a little more money at his disposal than he should have had.

"What could be more natural than to believe him in the story about the gold coins from the *Brother Jonathan*? But if you think about it carefully, it has only one origin—the words of Geoffrey Young. No one has seen this gold. That's why I don't believe in it either—but that is only my personal opinion. No one can really know whether the treasure exists or not. Anyway, it's always a good story."

"If the treasure exists, we will find it," Jupiter was convinced. In such situations, he never bothered about being modest. "You can help us, Mr Follows. We'd like to get an insight into some of the people here in Sandfield. As a journalist, you must know a lot of the residents, right?"

"Most of them," Mr Follows confirmed.

"We are especially interested in Eric Ellis and Steve Young, and the relationship they have with each other. There seems to be some rivalry in the air."

Ford Follows laughed. "That is beautifully put. That rivalry does indeed exist. As for the two gentlemen, I can tell you a few things. Eric Ellis is certainly the wealthiest resident of Sandfield."

"He owns two hotels and some holiday homes," Pete said. "We already found that out from his niece Amanda."

Follows nodded. "And he plans to build another hotel—a big and modern one. The two he already owns are venerable Victorian houses. Now he wants to have a big resort, with apartments, a sports centre, a swimming pool, restaurants, a discotheque—you know, a real resort."

"Of course, a lot of people in Sandfield don't like that. It would mean a whole new kind of tourism and probably drive away the people who love Sandfield for its tranquillity and originality. Many fear that they won't be able to rent out their own houses and apartments because tourists will either go to Ellis's new resort—or stay away altogether."

"Let me guess," Jupiter said. "One of the most bitter opponents of this project is Steve Young. That's why the two can't stand each other."

Mr Follows smiled ambiguously. "That's only half the truth. Of course Steve is against the resort. However, it's not just Steve Young who can't stand Eric Ellis—it's the other way round too. That's because Young's property is in the way of Ellis's building plans. He is planning the holiday resort at the north end of the bay, next to the cliff, where so far there is not a single building except Steve Young's house."

"Ellis already owns a large part of the land. There are also already building permits. What he lacks, however, is Steve Young's not exactly small plot of land. That is virtually surrounded by Ellis's property, but as long as Ellis does not own this last piece of land, it is of no use to him. Young, of course, refuses to sell his property. Ellis must have already offered him a lot of money for it, but that doesn't interest Steve Young one bit. He says the house is the only place in the world where he can work—whatever he does for work."

"What exactly does Steve Young do?" asked Bob.

"He writes articles for scientific magazines—physics, biology, chemistry... For all his eccentricity, he seems to be an intelligent man, after all, he earns his living with these articles."

Jupiter frowned thoughtfully. "His almost fanatical enthusiasm for the treasure doesn't seem to fit a scientist's image at all."

Mr Follows shrugged. "It's one of Steve Young's many peculiarities." He looked at his watch and stood up. "I've got to get going, boys. I've got another article waiting for me. Good luck with the treasure hunt!"

"I have one more quick question, Mr Follows," Jupiter stopped him. "Do you perhaps have any idea who the man might have been that Ellis was talking to about the *Eureka*? He has dark hair, quite long and tied back in a ponytail."

"No, sorry," said Follows. "The description means nothing to me, but Ellis deals with a lot of people, including business partners outside Sandfield, of course. Maybe that person was one of them."

“Well, thanks anyway. Have a good evening, Mr Follows.”

“You too, boys!” Mr Follows left the house.

“That wasn’t very productive,” Pete commented.

“I wouldn’t put it that way, Pete,” Jupiter objected. “After all, we were encouraged to find out more about Geoffrey Young—whether the treasure really exists or it’s all just legend. I already have a few ideas, but we can only put them into practice tomorrow. It’s too late for that today.”

“Will you also tell us what these ideas are?” asked Pete.

But before Jupiter could answer, the phone rang. The Three Investigators had not even noticed where the phone was in their holiday cottage. It was hanging on the wall by the passageway to the kitchen. Curious, Jupiter answered it. “Hello?”

“Jupiter, is that you? It’s Jo.”

“Hello, Jo! This is a surprise.”

“Listen, I’m calling from a petrol station on the main road. I was here filling up my car, and who do I see? A man with a long, dark ponytail down to his butt.”

“The man who spoke to Ellis!” shouted Jupiter.

“Exactly. He had just finished filling the tank, got into his car and drove off. I thought you might be interested.”

“Do you know where he went, Jo?”

“No, and I couldn’t follow him as I hadn’t finished yet, but I saw him heading north.”

The First Investigator thought for a moment. “Mr Ellis’s house is also to the north, isn’t it?”

“That’s right, you could see it from the boat today.”

“What kind of car was the man driving?”

“A green Alfa Romeo.”

“Thanks, Jo! I have to go, we don’t have time to lose.” Jupiter hung up.

“What happened?” asked Bob in alarm.

“Put on your shoes and rain jackets, fellas. The Three Investigators have a lead!”

## 6. Africa?

The Three Investigators crept under cover of darkness up the hill on which Mr Ellis's estate was situated. They had left Pete's car on the main road so as not to be seen immediately because the paved access road that led upwards between dense coniferous trees was part of the private property.

Then the grove cleared, and a long, gravel-strewn driveway led from the paved road to a large, illuminated roundabout, in the middle of which was a well-tended flower bed. Flowers also grew all around the façade of the house.

The house was a stark contrast to the colourful and ornate wooden houses that lined Sandfield's streets. It was a modern building with two storeys and a flat roof, gleaming white and unfussy. Some windows were lit, but curtains blocked the view inside.

Next to the stairs leading to the heavy metal door were two cars. Directly in the bright cone of outdoor lighting was a well-kept champagne-coloured Bentley, and a little way away was a somewhat shabby-looking green Alfa Romeo.

"That must be the car of the ponytailed man!" murmured Jupiter.

"What do we do now?" asked Pete.

"We'll sneak closer, maybe we can spot them somewhere," Jupiter decided.

"But we can't go over to the roundabout," Bob remarked. "It's too bright there. We'd better make our way to the back somehow."

They left the gravel driveway and crept through the grove that surrounded the house. After they had circled the building widely, they saw a wide, illuminated window front between the trees on the side facing the sea. There were no curtains here.

They could look directly into the room—a large living room bathed in the warm light of a few sweeping designer lamps and a flickering fireplace. The furniture was dark, angular and modern. A small, round figure stood by the fireplace with a wine glass in his hand.

"That must be Mr Ellis," Jupiter whispered.

Eric Ellis was in his mid-fifties, a few long blond strands were carefully combed over his almost bald head and he had a soft, good-natured-looking face. A large, black animal crouched at his side.

"Oh goodness! Is that a horse?" Pete whispered.

"That is a Great Dane, Pete!" Jupe said.

"Sheesh... Don't you think I know that?" Pete replied.

Both dog and master looked towards a point at the other end of the room that The Three Investigators could not see from here.

"He's talking to someone," Bob said.

"Our mysterious stranger," Jupiter guessed.

Ellis left his position by the fireplace and walked across the room. The dog followed him. They stepped out of the field of vision of The Three Investigators.

"This is the opportunity!" whispered Jupiter. "I'll creep closer!"

Before Pete or Bob could object, Jupiter ran across the patch of open lawn that separated the house from the trees and pressed himself against the wall under the windows. One of the



windows was opened a gap. A plume of tobacco smoke wafted outside. Apparently Ellis or his visitor was smoking in there and had pushed the window up to let the smoke out.

Jupiter heard voices. He crept on until he was standing directly under the open window. Now he could hear what was being said.

"You've been looking since Thursday now and haven't found anything yet," someone said in a hesitant voice. "Maybe it's better that way. Maybe we should leave it at that."

"Leave it at that?"

"Giving up the search, I mean."

"Ha! You've got it all figured out, don't you, Mr Ellis? I'm just supposed to pull a Plan B out of the hat now, or what? There is no Plan B. Believe me, I'm an expert in these things. That used to be my profession."

"I'm just saying. My niece told me today that a shark has been spotted near the coast. Diving might not be safe, Ricardo."

"You just let me worry about that, Ellis. My men already know what they're doing." The man's voice took on a threatening undertone. "And you will pay them. We have a deal, remember?"

"So?"

"I suggest that you should keep to it. You're already too deep to back out now... especially with McCreary and Steve Young... If you don't want to get busted, you'd better do what we agreed to."

"Get busted? Are you going to blow my cover? This is blackmail!"

"No, Ellis, no," Ricardo said placatingly. "I'm with you all the way! You've already put so much money into this thing. McCreary alone is going to collect a big chunk—it would be most unfortunate if that investment didn't pay off now, wouldn't it? Look, Ellis, it's not my fault that damn boat sank." There was silence for a while.

Then Ellis said: "How long will it take you and your men to find the wreck?"

"I can't tell you that. Africa is not exactly small. Maybe we'll find it tomorrow... maybe we'll find it in a week... who knows?"

"All right. I'll give you half the money now, the other half when you find the wreck. You have one week. If you haven't found anything by then, we call off the search and the thing is dead."

At that moment, something rustled near Jupiter. It was probably just a bird, but the First Investigator was so startled that he took an unconscious step to the side and stepped into a bush and made it rustle again—only this time much louder.

Immediately the dog started barking inside.

"What was that?" asked Ricardo in alarm.

"What?"

"Out there! Look, the dog is going crazy."

"Oh, that was probably just a cat. Geoffrey always freaks out when he hears or smells them. Come on, Geoffrey, calm down. Come here, old boy. Just close the window or the dog won't give it a rest."

Jupiter, who had remained tensely crouched under the window, saw it close above him. After that, he could hear nothing more.

Jupiter peered into the darkness and spotted Bob and Pete behind a bush. They raised a hand in warning. Jupiter understood. If he ran back now, Ellis and Ricardo would see him through the window.

However, after a while, Pete stuck his thumb in the air and Bob waved him over. Jupiter ran off. Unnoticed, he reached his friends in the protective darkness.

“Phew, that was a close one, Jupe!” said Pete.

“What a bummer. Just when things were getting interesting, the stupid dog started barking! Ellis calls him ‘Geoffrey’, by the way.”

“Was it about the treasure?” Bob wanted to know.

“It’s hard to say.” Jupiter told his friends what he had heard. Bob immediately made some notes.

“That already sounds like a treasure hunt!” Pete said excitedly.

“Yes, but in Africa?” asked Bob, irritated. “Are you sure you didn’t hear wrong, Jupe?”

“Absolutely. Besides, it was about money and a task Ellis gave Ricardo, and which he would like to withdraw... but Ricardo insists on carrying it out otherwise he’d blow Ellis’s cover. It sounded pretty criminal, and there was talk of a wreck, but not of a treasure.”

“Hmm...” Bob murmured. “A wreck in Africa... That doesn’t sound to me like it’s about Geoffrey Young’s treasure.”

Jupiter shook his head. “We need more information... and that’s why we should go back to the car. When this Ricardo leaves here, I want to be in a position to follow him.”

They heard a noise from the front of the house. A door slammed! And shortly afterwards distant voices and footsteps.

“Darn! He is leaving now!”

They started creeping briskly away from the house, but when they reached the roundabout, the Alfa Romeo was already moving. The light from the headlights flashed across the bushes, behind which The Three Investigators could just duck in time. Then the car drove down the driveway to the road.

They had no chance of catching up with him.

## 7. Africa!

The next morning during breakfast, The Three Investigators made plans for the day.

Pete's task was to pay Steve Young a visit. They had recalled that Young had mentioned a box in which he kept heirlooms from his ancestors. Perhaps there was something to be found among these things that would allow conclusions to be drawn about the *Eureka* and the treasure.

Jupiter was supposed to go to the Brother Jonathan café and discreetly ask Amanda about her uncle.

Finally, Bob was sent to the Sandfield library to find out all about Geoffrey Young. There he now stood in the local history section, which was tiny, wondering if he could find out anything here. Randomly, he pulled out a book. The cloud of dust he raised made him sneeze. One thing was certain—nothing had been taken out from this corner for a long time.

There were only a handful of books about Sandfield, plus a few about the nearby city of Eureka and the rest of Northern California. It wasn't much. Bob found a write-up of the *Brother Jonathan* disaster in 1865, but there was nothing in it that he didn't already know. He didn't come across the name Geoffrey Young once.

Discouraged, Bob went to the circulation desk where an old lady with snow-white hair sat sorting some old books. She wore her reading glasses on a gold chain, and her white, high-collared blouse was adorned with a porcelain brooch. When Bob approached the lady, she eyed him suspiciously over the rim of her glasses.

"Excuse me, ma'am, I hope you can help me. I am looking for information about a former resident of Sandfield by the name of Geoffrey Young. Does that name mean anything to you?"

Instantly, the librarian's face began to glow. "Geoffrey Young—of course! You won't find much about him in our books, though. He was famous, but not that famous."

"That's unfortunate," Bob said, disappointed.

"I could tell you about Geoffrey Young," she replied much to Bob's surprise.

"Really? What do you know about him?"

"Quite a bit. I knew him, after all."

Bob adjusted his guess of how old the librarian might be—perhaps upwards by a few years.

"At that time, I was still a young girl and he was already a grown man... but we were friends, if you can put it that way." She giggled, suddenly seeming a decade younger. "I had a crush on him. All the girls at Sandfield fancied him, but he really liked me. He used to tease me about my red hair and call me 'Paprika', and promised me he'd take me on his ship to the South Seas. Unfortunately, he died after that. Even years later, I wondered if he really would have taken me." She sighed and smiled beatifically. Then the sternness returned to her face. "But I'm sure you want to know very different things."

Bob nodded. "I'd be interested to know if he's been around the world much. Has he been to Africa, for example?"

She laughed. "Africa? No, definitely not. He was always talking about the big world, but he never got further than San Francisco."

Bob inwardly brushed aside any questions he might have had about Africa and decided to try another approach: “The story goes that Geoffrey found the *Brother Jonathan* treasure... or at least part of it.”

The lady nodded and smiled ambiguously. “Oh yes, that’s what they say.”

“And is it the truth?” asked Bob straightforwardly.

Her smile became more mysterious. “The people of Sandfield have been discussing this question for decades... and you will hear as many opinions as you ask people. I can only tell you what I think.”

Bob leaned forward with interest.

“One day, when Geoffrey once again promised to take me to the South Seas, I couldn’t believe him. ‘You don’t have the money to go to the South Seas,’ I said, and do you know what he replied? ‘Gold, Paprika, I have gold!’ Then he took out a coin—a gold coin—and showed it to me. I didn’t know then if the gold was real or just another joke of his. He liked to joke. Finally, I decided not to believe him.

“A few weeks later, disaster struck, the *Eureka* ran into a rock and sank. Geoffrey managed to save himself ashore, but got pneumonia.” The librarian bowed her head.

In a low voice, she continued: “In the two weeks he had left to live, I visited him a few times. All the time, he was convinced that he would get well again. ‘Nothing knocks out Geoffrey Young so quickly,’ he said, but he’s got a high fever. One day, I was sitting next to him, holding his glowing hand, and he said: ‘The gold is well hidden in the depths. Perhaps one day, somebody will find it.’ And then he gave me the coin. Two days later, he died.”

Having said that, she reached to the back of her neck, removed a chain and handed it to Bob. On the chain hung a bezel-set gold coin.

“Years later, I had this coin checked. It is genuine.”

When Pete left for Steve Young’s place, it was raining again. He went down to the beach, hurried along the bay to the northern end and took a flight of stairs up there.

A footpath led past a large car park to the main road, but to the left of it spread a wide, grassy area. Every few metres there were self-painted signs rammed into the sandy ground: ‘Private Property!’, ‘Do Not Enter!’, ‘No Trespassing!’, ‘No Crossing!’. This terrain stretched about two hundred metres inland before it rose and led to the tree-covered hill of Eric Ellis’s house.

Despite the warnings, Pete entered the property and walked towards the small, warped cottage they had seen from the boat the day before. It stood directly on the edge of the cliff that went down twenty metres to the water.

The house looked small and lost in the waving sea of grass at the edge of the abyss. Somehow it was also romantic, and the smoke billowing from the crooked chimney, immediately torn apart by the sea breeze, promised cosy stove warmth.

With hunched shoulders, Pete went to the wooden door and knocked.

“Who is it?” grumbled Steve Young’s dark voice.

“Pete Crenshaw of The Three Investigators. May I come in, please, sir? I have a few questions for you.”

The door opened with a creak. Young looked even wilder than the day before, for this time, he was wearing crookedly buttoned pyjamas and a tattered brown bathrobe. It was hard to tell where the shaggy hair ended and the shaggy beard began.

“So Pete,” was all Young said, turning and returning to the living room. Pete interpreted this as an invitation and entered. The wind and rain were shut out as he closed the door.

“Didn’t you see the signs?”

“Uh, yes, but...”

“Well, never mind. I didn’t put them up because of you. It’s for Ellis, who’s always letting some nosy people wander around my property without my permission... Coffee?”

“Uh... no thanks.”

“So what are you here for?”

But Pete barely heard the question, for his gaze had wandered around the room. The inside of the house consisted of a single room. This was where Steve Young lived, slept and ate. In one corner stood an unmade bed. In another, a gas cooker, a stained sink full of dishes and a refrigerator. A narrow staircase led upstairs.

The rest of the room was littered with the most amazing items. On a huge table in the middle were countless glass flasks, test tubes and dishes. Some of them held colourful liquids, others had white gas wafting around and some were connected by straight and spiral glass tubes. The walls were filled to the ceiling with shelves holding Bunsen burners and other instruments Pete had never seen before. Everything was full of brown bottles and containers of liquids and powders.

There were also books, magazines and newspapers piled up on the shelves. Like glaciers, they had flowed from the shelves to the floor, where they formed more adventurous piles and warps. Only one wall was not filled with storage shelves. Instead, there was an old wood-burning stove with a fire flickering in it. Alongside it, was a massive desk covered with papers and burn marks.

“You like it?” Young asked and a mocking smile played around his mouth.

Pete realized that he had just been standing there staring for half an eternity. “It’s... impressive,” he muttered. “What are you doing now?”

“Working,” Young replied curtly, “and you?”

“I wanted to ask you a few questions—”

“You’ve already said that. Go ahead and ask then!”

Pete cleared his throat. “You said something yesterday about a box where you keep old heirlooms. We were wondering if there might be things from your great-uncle among them.”

“You mean objects that could give a clue to the treasure—a map, for example? If that’s all you investigators have to offer, you won’t get far. I had the thought myself long ago, of course. I searched that box many times, but there’s nothing there.”

“Maybe you missed something,” Pete said timidly. “May I have a look inside?”

Young snorted contemptuously and led him wordlessly to the narrow staircase. Pete followed him to a draughty, low attic where lots of junk were stored.

Steve Young tapped his right foot carelessly against a wooden chest with iron fittings. Pete squatted down next to it and opened it. The chest was padded inside and lined with dark blue velvet. Pete saw some old books, a globe, a brass telescope, a small ornate wooden box with jewellery, an old gun and a sextant. He randomly took out one of the books.

“If you’re hoping they are logbooks of my great-uncle, I have to disappoint you. They are just diaries of my aunt and maternal grandmother. They weren’t related to Geoffrey Young at all. As far as I’m concerned, there’s nothing of value in them, but go ahead and read them if you think so.” A sneer played around Young’s mouth. Then he turned without a word and went down the stairs.

Pete skimmed a few pages in one of the diaries... then in the next... and the next... It was deadly boring. Geoffrey Young was not mentioned anywhere at all. Sighing, he put the diaries back in the chest and wandered helplessly back and forth in the attic.

If the First Investigator were here now, he might have discovered something. Jupiter was always discovering something where there was actually nothing to discover... but Pete only saw lots of junk and a chest with nothing of interest in it. Frustrated, he stepped up to the small window, seemingly the only source of light for the attic, and looked out through the dirty panes to the sea.

Startled, he took half a step back. Only then did he realize how close the house was to the cliff. Outside this window, the cliff went down more or less vertically with the wall of the house almost forming a line with the rock plunging into the depths. Below, the waves crashed against the black cliff and sprayed metres high. Seagulls floated seemingly weightlessly in the updraughts. Pete recognized the sea lion rock they had passed the day before. There were also many other rocks jutting out from the water, like little islands. One of them looked like a squatting dog. In another, Pete thought he saw the outline of Africa.

The Second Investigator winced.

Africa?

He ran down the stairs.

"So did you find anything?" asked Steve Young as mockingly as before.

"Yes!" Pete shouted and was already at the door.

"Really?" Young seemed puzzled. "What?"

But Pete decided that Steve Young had not earned this news. "We'll get back to you later. Thanks!"

He just left the bearded man standing there and left the house.

## 8. Sharks and Harpoons

“Africa?” Jupiter asked when they met again in the afternoon at the holiday cottage as arranged. He looked sceptically out of the window. “Are you sure?”

“It doesn’t look like that from here,” Pete said impatiently, “but when you stand on the cliff, that big rock up ahead is really shaped like Africa! To be absolutely sure, I called Mr Follows after I got back here. I asked him if the small rocky islands off the bay had names. The bigger ones do indeed have... and that one is called ‘Africa’!”

He pushed the open notebook over to Bob, in which the latter had already written the names, dates and facts of this case the night before, as he always did. This time, for once, Pete had also added something, namely a rough sketch of the coastline of Sandfield with the offshore islands and their names.

“Of course, that puts the conversation between Ellis and Ricardo in a completely different light,” Jupe said. “We should go out again and take a closer look at the matter.”

“I’ve already tried to reach Jo,” Pete said, “but her answering machine said that the shop will open in... uh... about an hour.”

“No more fear of sharks?” asked Jupiter.

“Yes, but I’m not going diving.”

“Was there anything else?” Bob wanted to know.

Pete shrugged his shoulders. “Actually, no. Steve Young was impossible as usual... and Mr Follows was a bit weird on the phone. He immediately wanted to know if there was anything new in our treasure hunt and if that was why I was asking about the island names. I almost think he was making fun of us. Well, he’ll be surprised. So, how was your morning?”

Now Bob told them what he had found out in the library. When Pete and Jupiter heard about the real gold coin, they were immediately very excited.

“So there really is gold!” cried Pete. “There is a treasure and it’s at the bottom of the sea! We are on the right track!”

“Looks like it...” Jupiter said.

“Do you have any other news?” Bob turned to Jupiter.

The First Investigator nodded. “I spent a long time with Amanda, who was very grateful for a bit of company. She was still all excited about the shark story and showed me a book she found in the book corner of the café.” Jupiter handed Pete the volume Amanda had lent him. It was a book about sharks.

“We went through it together and tried to figure out what kind of shark it was—based on your description. Open it where we put bookmarks!”

Reluctantly, Pete turned to the book. He didn’t really felt like dealing with the subject, which he had just successfully suppressed. He glanced at the illustrations. At the second picture, it was as if he saw an old acquaintance. “That’s it!”

“Are you sure?” Jupe asked.

“Absolutely. I’ll never forget that huge mouth.” Pete read the heading of the chapter. “A basking shark! So, that’s what it is called!”

“Basking shark?” Bob’s eyes widened. “Basking? That doesn’t sound very horrific, does it?”

Jupiter smiled. “You’re right, it doesn’t, but they can become really huge—anywhere from eight to eleven metres long. In fact, the basking shark is the second largest living shark after the whale shark. However, they are completely harmless to humans... and sea lions too, by the way.

“Basking sharks feed only on plankton, very small fish, and invertebrates, which they filter out of the water with their gill rakers, hence the greatly-enlarged mouth. This is similar to what filter-feeding whales do with their baleen.

“I can imagine it was a terrifying sight, Pete, as the basking shark has been mistaken for the great white shark since they have a similar body plan. However, your basking friend is absolutely harmless. It would never have attacked you. You were very lucky to see one of the most fascinating and rare creatures of the sea in its natural habitat.”

The Second Investigator was speechless for a moment. “You mean it was nothing?”

“Well... I wouldn’t say nothing, but it was nothing dangerous.”

Pete was torn between great relief—and frustration. Suddenly, the epic story of his battle for survival with a monster shark had shrunk to a zoological anecdote that was hardly breathtaking.

“I don’t care,” he finally said. “I’m still not diving there anymore. After all, the critter could have mistaken me for plankton and accidentally filtered me through its gill rakers, couldn’t it?” He crossed his arms defiantly. “Shouldn’t you be finding out something else from Amanda?”

“Yes,” Bob said, rushing to Pete’s aid with a change of subject. “I thought you were going to ask Amanda about her uncle, Jupe.”

“I did,” Jupiter said, “and I even set up a meeting with Mr Ellis.”

Pete and Bob were amazed. “How did you do that?”

“By telling Amanda that the three of us are fresh at college and are doing research for a geography project. We are supposed to write a paper on holiday resorts by next semester. It occurred to her all on her own that her uncle could help us with it. He just happens to be planning such a resort—can you believe it? I was of course appropriately surprised by this unbelievable coincidence and gratefully accepted her offer to call him right away from the café and make an appointment to meet him. So now we are invited to his place tonight.”

“At his house?” cried Pete in surprise.

Jupiter nodded.

“That’s great!” Bob burst out.

“But until then we still have a little time... and we still have something to do.” Jupiter looked at his watch. “We should go down to the boat rental shop and ask Jo if she’ll go to ‘Africa’ with us.”

They reached the shop on the beach and met Jo. Excitedly, they told her the news. Jo quickly caught fire, and so it didn’t take long for them to gather the equipment and load it onto the boat.

Five minutes later, they were on the water. It had become very windy and the leaden grey rain clouds were drifting quickly across the dull sky. The rain was light but steady.

“I’d still rather stay in the boat today,” Pete said halfway, “even if it was just a harmless basking shark yesterday.”

“I’m going down,” Jupiter said firmly.

Pete was relieved. “And if a great white shark comes this time, Jupe, you know what to do—just swim towards it!”



"I'll come with you," Jo said and immediately started putting on her equipment.

Soon after, they reached Africa Rock. The tiny island measured about twenty metres wide. A few seagulls perched on its jagged rocks. The Three Investigators and Jo circled the island once at a proper distance to avoid the shoals. They found a spot where they could moor the boat to a rocky outcrop sticking out of the water.

"Watch out that you don't get tossed around," Jo urged Pete and Bob. "If the sea gets too rough, you'd better untie the boat and keep a distance from the rocks."

"All right," said Bob, "and you take good care of yourselves!"

"Nothing will happen," Jupiter said confidently. "We'll be back in about half an hour." Then they both went into the water and were submerged a moment later.

They hadn't been gone long when Pete spotted something. He pointed towards the coast. "Look, Bob... a motorboat just left the harbour. It's coming our way."

"Maybe it's just a fishing boat," Bob mused.

"It doesn't look like a fishing boat. Wait, I have binoculars with me." Pete rummaged in his backpack. "Three men are on board," he said. "They don't look like fishermen. Two of them are wearing diving gear, and they're looking in our direction. Now they're turning away a bit. Strange, isn't it? I wonder if it's that Ricardo and his men?"

"Who else would go out diving in this weather?" said Bob gloomily. "Right in our direction at that. What are we going to do now?"

"We can't do anything," Pete said. "Just wait and see."

The boat was clearly faster than theirs, and was heading towards them. However, about a hundred metres away, it stopped. The men looked over suspiciously. Then the two divers went into the water and immediately disappeared.

The man remaining in the boat kept looking over at the two investigators, but then did not seem to care further about their presence. It was hard to tell if it was Ricardo because he was wearing a cap against the biting wind.

"Jo and Juve should be starting to show up again, shouldn't they?" asked Bob, glancing nervously at his watch, but to his surprise, barely fifteen minutes had passed.

Suddenly, Jupiter's head shot out of the water only a few metres from the boat. He spat out his mouthpiece and shouted: "Start the engine! We have to get out of here!"

"Sharks?" cried Pete in horror.

"Worse," Jupiter replied curtly. "Come on, Pete, help me into the boat!"

"Where's Jo?" Pete asked.

"She's coming," Juve replied.

Pete helped him up while Bob started the engine. Seconds later, Jo also appeared and climbed into the boat.

"Life-threatening!" she gasped, but that was all Pete and Bob could get out of her.

Jo was not quite on board when Jupiter ordered: "Step on it, Bob! Back to the beach! Go!"

Bob revved the engine and steered the boat towards the shore. "What on earth happened?" he asked.

"Divers!" Jupiter groaned. "Two divers were suddenly there and threatened us with harpoons. They shot at me!"

"With harpoons?" Pete was horrified.

"Fortunately far past us," Jo added, still completely out of breath. "Where did they suddenly come from?"

“A boat came towards us,” Bob explained. “Two men dived into the water, but we didn’t see that they had harpoons with them. It’s over there. Do you recognize it, Jo?”

Jo grabbed the binoculars and looked through them. “That’s Ellis’s boat,” she growled.

“And the man on board?” Pete asked.

“Hard to say... but it’s not Ellis...” Jo continued. “Could be that Ricardo guy, but I only saw him once briefly, and now he’s wearing a cap. Actually, it doesn’t matter who they are. The men are on Ellis’s boat—which means he’s behind it! They could have killed us! I’ll get him. I’m going to go and confront him right now!”

“Better not,” said Jupiter.

“But Juve!” shouted Bob. “If they shot at you—”

“I don’t think they wanted to shoot us as the shot went too wide for that. I believe they only wanted to scare us, and they succeeded in doing that. If we go to Ellis now and confront him, he’ll be warned. Then he’ll know we’re looking for the treasure as well.”

“Ricardo will tell him anyway,” Bob objected.

“Yes, but would Ricardo know who we are? I suppose their boat was too far away, or did he have binoculars with him?”

Pete shook his head.

“Then he can’t have seen much,” Juve continued. “Remember, we have an appointment with Ellis. I don’t want him to be warned.”

Jo protested, but Pete and Bob understood the First Investigator’s logic, and finally they were able to convince Jo that it was better not to do anything for the time being.

They had almost reached the beach when Bob remembered something else. “Did you find anything?”

The two shook their heads. “Nothing but mud, shells and a few fish,” Jupiter said.

“First sharks, then homicidal divers with harpoons—and all for nothing,” said Pete.

“What have we got ourselves into?”

## 9. Good Mr Ellis

Jo promised to continue supporting The Three Investigators. She wanted to keep an eye on Africa Rock as long as she was at the boat rental shop because from there, she had a perfect view of what was happening on the water.

Arriving back at the holiday cottage, the three boys only had time to change clothes and eat a few sandwiches before they had to leave for their appointment with Mr Ellis. A little nervously, they drove in Pete's car through the rain along the main road that led north along the bay. This time they did not leave the car at the entrance, but drove up the private driveway until they reached the roundabout in front of the main entrance.

"I hope this goes well," Pete muttered uneasily. "What are we going to do if Ellis asks us something about our geography project? That's why we're here, after all—officially, I mean."

"We'll think of something," Jupiter replied confidently.

"You had better think of something now, Juve!" insisted Pete. "If he asks me, our cover will be blown immediately."

"Don't worry, Pete. You have a completely different task."

They stepped up to the metallic front door and rang the bell. The dog barked.

A little later, the door was opened. Up close, Eric Ellis was even smaller than he had looked through the window the night before. He was wearing a somewhat baggy cardigan, which only partially concealed his handsome belly, along with loose-fitting cloth trousers and slippers. His smile was open and friendly.

"You must be the three boys my niece Amanda told me about—the ones who saw a shark, right? Shut up, Geoffrey!" he called to the back. The dog fell silent.

"Good evening, Mr Ellis. I'm Jupiter Jones, and these are my friends Pete Crenshaw and Bob Andrews. Pete saw the shark."

"Come in, come in!" Mr Ellis led The Three Investigators into the house.

From a dimly lit vestibule, they went directly into the large living room that the boys had seen from the outside the night before. In the middle of the room was the seating area of heavy leather chairs and expensive rugs on the floor. One wall was occupied by a bookcase of reddish-brown wood. A fire crackled in the fireplace, in front of which lay Geoffrey, the large black Great Dane, who immediately jumped up and ran towards the strangers to sniff them.

"Down, Geoffrey!"

"It's all right, Mr Ellis," Pete said. "He's quite nice." Pete liked animals—as long as they didn't show him their teeth.

Ellis offered The Three Investigators Coke, which they accepted with thanks. They sat down in the leather chairs.

"Tell me more about this shark, Pete!" asked Mr Ellis.

"Oh, there's not that much to tell," Pete evaded and then gave a short version of his experience.

"It's horrible," said Mr Ellis. "Really ghastly! I bet you won't want to go in the water again any time soon, am I right?"

“Oh, it was just a basking shark,” said the Second Investigator, waving it off nonchalantly. Suddenly he liked the story again, at least until he noticed Bob next to him suppressing a giggle.

“Why did you go diving in the first place? It’s not exactly ideal weather.”

“That’s exactly why,” Jupiter answered quickly, before Pete could somehow give himself away. “We thought that the rain would bother us the least if we were under water, but that was a foolish thought. It was cold, uncomfortable and dangerous... and after all, we came to Sandfield for a completely different reason.”

“Right,” said Mr Ellis. “You three are going to write a paper for college, aren’t you? About resorts, if Amanda described it to me correctly.”

“Yes,” Bob confirmed, “and it’s awfully nice of you to want to help us.”

“I am very happy to do that. I am happy when young people are interested in the tourism business. What exactly do you want to know?”

“Er... well...” Bob began and looked over at Jupiter for help.

“The core topic of our work is structural change in small-town areas as a result of large tourism projects,” Jupiter said as if he had never spoken about anything else. Bob and Pete wondered admiringly if he had been thinking about this fictitious project all the way here or if it had just occurred to him.

Mr Ellis certainly seemed to like it. “A wonderful topic!” he said enthusiastically, “because structural change in this case means that my resort will double the number of guests in Sandfield... and that’s good for retail, for restaurants—in fact, good for everyone, isn’t it?”

“At first it sounds like it,” Jupiter agreed with him. “However, we have also heard critical voices about your building project.”

Eric Ellis smiled mildly. “There are always critical voices when you want to do something new and different. People don’t like change, even if it is change for the better. No one will be against my resort once it’s finished because everyone will benefit from it. It’s pretty easy to pick on the richest man in town, don’t you think? Eric Ellis, the evil hotelier—he’s quick to be blamed for everything, no matter what goes wrong. I think some people in Sandfield even blame me for the bad weather. In fact, I suffer more from the rain than anyone else because I have more empty beds and my running costs are much higher.”

“The critics say that your planned modern building will change the whole townscape.”

“But I’m not building in the town,” Ellis countered. “I’m building right up here on the edge of the cliff. I can’t even get near the Victorian houses.”

“However, the building land there does not belong to you at all, as we have heard.”

Mr Ellis smiled. “Now I see where your scepticism comes from. You’ve been talking to Steve Young, right?”

“Well,” Jupiter began and was about to explain that they had not heard this story from Young at all, but from Ford Follows.

However, Ellis did not let him get a word in. “I thought so. Well, let me tell you my side of the story. I like Steve, believe it or not. I think he’s a nice, quirky guy... and basically, I’m just trying to help him.”

“Help him?” Pete enquired. “It sounded to us like you were trying to drive him off his property.”

“Drive him off?” Ellis laughed. “But I can’t do that at all. He owns the property. How could I drive him off? In fact, I offered to buy it from him—that’s right... and at a very, very good price. He’ll never get a better offer than that.”

“What if he doesn’t want to sell?” Pete interjected.

“Then he’s putting himself in great danger. I take it that Steve didn’t tell you about the geotechnical assessment?”

“Geotechnical assessment?” Jupiter asked.

“Well, that’s typical of him again. Steve Young is always raging against me, but he likes to forget a little important detail. I have had the land on which I want to build my resort examined. The subsoil report showed that the piece of land close to the cliff is in danger of collapsing and therefore may not be built on. It’s about the last few metres before the cliff.”

“The few metres where Mr Young’s house is…” Jupiter said.

Ellis nodded. “The ground can slide there at any time… and if it does, it will take Steve’s house down with it.”

Pete’s eyes widened. “Then Mr Young’s life is in danger!”

“He is… and he wouldn’t even know it if I hadn’t commissioned that assessment. However, he now blanks that out.”

“And you think this could happen any day?” asked Bob.

“That is correct. Of course, it’s impossible to predict. It could happen today, or in ten years’ time… but it will happen sooner or later. The continuous rain doesn’t make it any better, of course. The ground gets saturated with water and that can cause a landslide. Steve Young is playing with his life… but I’m still the bad guy.” Ellis shrugged resignedly. “Anyway, I can’t do more than give him a good price for the land. It’s his decision to make.”

“But Mr Ellis,” Pete asked, “why would you still want to buy his property when you know that it can collapse?”

“Aha!” Mr Ellis replied. “I’m glad you asked that. You see, in the first place, I had wanted his plot of land for my resort. When he continually refused to sell, I reworked my building plans solely on my own land. However, the geotechnical assessment changes everything. His house is not on safe ground. Having said that, I still offered to buy it so that I could demolish the house, engage construction to stabilize the cliff to prevent soil erosion and landslides. This is all recommended in the geotechnical report. However, I still cannot put a building on the same spot, but I could use the land a safe distance back for something else—for example, a playground and a lookout to the sea. My buildings are all to be constructed on safe ground.”

Silence spread. This conversation had gone completely different from what The Three Investigators had thought. They had expected to sit across from a slick businessman who bounced all critical questions off him. Instead, they seemed to be dealing with a reasonable, open-minded person.

Then Pete suddenly remembered that they were actually here for a completely different reason. He had a mission to fulfil! Somewhat abruptly, he said: “A very nice house you have.”

“Pete is also taking an architecture course at college,” Jupiter explained, winking almost imperceptibly at the Second Investigator. “Knowing him, he’d love to take a look around your place, but doesn’t dare to ask.”

“Oh, but of course! I’ll show you around.”

“That would be great!” said Bob enthusiastically.

“Then come!”

The tour of the house was long and detailed. The ground floor impressed with huge rooms with only a few selected pieces of furniture. Everything was very modernly furnished and kept incredibly clean and tidy.

They also took a look at Ellis’s study. It was dominated by large shelves full of files and a massive old desk with a computer on it. However, they didn’t stay here for long because

Ellis wanted to show them the library in the first floor.

They were standing at the foot of the stairs when Pete said: "Excuse me, Mr Ellis, where's the... well, I need to—"

"Last door on the left," Ellis said, pointing down the long carpeted hallway. "We're going upstairs."

"Thank you. I'll be right with you."

Pete walked a little way down the hallway and listened to the footsteps on the stairs slowly fading away. Then he hurried to the study and slipped inside.

He did not have much time, and immediately headed for the desk. He briefly considered turning on the computer but he didn't know it well enough. It was probably password-protected and he might break something. Instead, he turned to the papers on the table—business letters, notes, an open diary... but none of them seemed informative at first glance.

A folder labelled 'Geotechnical Report' caught his eye. The Second Investigator opened it. The report had been prepared by a firm called Barks & McCreary, but after Pete had skimmed the first few sentences, he realized he didn't understand a word of the technical jargon. He folded it shut again and his eyes fell on a wooden box decorated with mother-of-pearl on the table. Carefully he lifted the lid. Inside the box were stamps, a letter opener and two bulging envelopes with names on them.

Pete pushed the stamps aside to be able to read the names. One envelope said 'Ricardo', the other 'Raya'. They were not taped shut, so Pete could take a look inside. Both envelopes were full of banknotes. Pete was startled by the large sum, quickly put the envelopes back into place and closed the box.

Then his gaze lingered on the desk drawer. If there were already stacks of money in a box, what would be kept in the drawer? Hesitantly, he reached out for the handle. The drawer would not open. Pete jiggled it briefly. Suddenly a shrill ringing sounded.

He had set off an alarm! What should he do now? Torn between the impulse to run away and the thought of waiting for Mr Ellis and telling him some tall tale, Pete stood frozen.

The ringing went on continuously...

Suddenly, Pete realized that it was not an alarm. It was the phone on the desk, and the ringing was loud. It just happened to ring at the second Pete was about to open the drawer.

Anyway, Ellis was on his way here. Pete could already hear hurried footsteps on the stairs. If he left the study now, he would run right into Ellis's arms. He frantically looked around. A heavy leather wing chair stood decoratively in one corner. Pete ran to it, ducked down and held his breath.

The door was opened. Someone rushed across the room and picked up the phone.

"Yes?" said Ellis. "Ricardo, at last! You said you'd be in touch much earlier. I have visitors right now and not much time. What's new?"

Pete listened intently. He could hear the caller's voice, but only understood fragments of what was being said.

"... Not much... we... found."

"But you assured me that you know where to look."

"... So simple... besides... divers..."

"Excuse me, divers? What divers?"

"Four people in one..."

"Who were they? What kind of boat were they in?"

"... Don't know... could not see..."

"Hmm... that sounds suspiciously like Jo Hilton's boat... but why would she go diving there of all places, and at around this time? Who were the other three?"

“... Diving mask... on board... teenagers, but...”

“Teenagers?” Ellis repeated. “That’s very revealing.”

“... Have fled... harpoons...”

“Your people went after the teenagers with harpoons?”

“No, they... harpoons because of... shark... They... too dangerous...”

“Leave the harpoons at home in future!” hissed Ellis angrily. “The shark thing was a false alarm. I hope there won’t be any more trouble because of this rashness. Anyway, I have to get back to my guests. Continue your search tomorrow and report back to me as soon as you find anything, will you?”

Ellis hung up and left the study. Only when Pete heard the footsteps on the stairs did he breathe a sigh of relief and leave his hiding place. He slipped out of the study and rushed into the bathroom, flushed the toilet and went up the stairs to join the others.

The evening ended half an hour later. After the tour of the house, Jupiter had a few innocuous questions about the tourism industry, which Mr Ellis answered willingly. After that, The Three Investigators thanked their host and said goodbye.

As they sat in the car and drove down to the main road, Pete reported on his visit to the study. “Ellis has become suspicious.”

“Are you sure?” asked Bob anxiously.

“When Ricardo told him that there were teenagers on board the boat, he was suspicious. How many young people might have been diving in the last few days? Now he must suspect that we are hiding something from him. After all, we told him in detail about the basking shark, but not a word about the harpoon divers. By the way, our shark story was the reason why Ricardo’s men carried harpoons in the first place. The story went from us to Amanda to Ellis and then to Ricardo. Anyway, Ellis now knows we were hiding something from him.”

“Instead, we know that he is hoarding considerable sums of cash in his study, destined for Ricardo and a person called Raya,” Jupe countered.

“Great! And what are we going to do with this?” Pete shook his head and made a grim face. “I think our visit did more harm than good. We’re going to regret going to Ellis’s today.”

## 10. Gold Fever

The next morning, an energetic pounding at the door roused The Three Investigators from their sleep.

“Open up!” someone yelled angrily.

Jupiter struggled out of bed and stumbled to the door. “Who’s there?”

“Open up, I say!” The door shook.

“Wait a minute!” Jupiter opened the door.

Steve Young was standing in front of him and he was furious. His eyes were sparkling. “How dare you brats! Is this what you call investigation work? Ever heard of client confidentiality?”

Bob and Pete came down the stairs in their pyjamas and stood behind Jupiter. “What’s the matter?” Bob wanted to know sleepily.

“What’s the matter? As if you didn’t know! The whole town is upside down—thanks to you!” With these words he entered the house and held the latest edition of the *Times-Standard*—the daily newspaper from Eureka, in front of The Three Investigators.

A headline jumped out at them:

*GEOFFREY YOUNG’S TREASURE DISCOVERED?*

“What?” cried Jupiter, snatching the newspaper out of Young’s hand. Quickly he skimmed the article.

The old story about the *Brother Jonathan* and the idea that Geoffrey Young might have recovered part of the gold treasure was rehashed—and then it claimed that the great-nephew of the legendary Geoffrey Young had discovered proof that the treasure actually existed, and he was already searching for it in Sandfield Bay. In addition, there was talk that a gold fever had already broken out in the small, tranquil town.

Jupiter lowered the newspaper in bewilderment.

“How dare you tell the press about the treasure?” Young shouted at the three boys.

“We didn’t tell the press anything,” Pete defended himself. “Really! Mr Young!”

“I’m afraid we did,” Bob said, looking concerned. He reached for the newspaper and looked for the name of the author. “Indeed... Ford Follows.”

“Follows, that scribbler! He’ll write any rubbish as long as he can fill lines with it!”

“But... but we didn’t know anything about it!” said Pete. “We treated him as a friend, not a reporter. None of what we told him was meant for the papers!”

“How stupid can you be!” rumbled Young.

“We seem to have misjudged Mr Follows indeed,” Jupiter admitted, “and for that we are truly sorry. But don’t you think that the residents of Sandfield, who know both Mr Follows and you, are very well-placed to judge the truthfulness of this article?”

“The people of Sandfield think I’m crazy, you smart-ass,” Young snapped at the First Investigator, “and they believe every crazy story about me. But that’s not what I’m about. It’s about the people who don’t know me. The *Times-Standard* is read all over the region. When half of Northern California hears about this story—”



“—Then we are dealing with a self-fulfilling prophecy,” Jupiter said, startled. “The claim that there is a gold rush in Sandfield is nonsense, but there will be one... very soon.”

“And I have you to thank for that! You are no good as investigators! You have found out nothing, nothing at all. Instead, you’ve ensured that hordes of treasure hunters will soon be flocking to Sandfield to take my treasure away from me! I’m taking you off the case!”

“In fact, right now, you should let us get on with it,” Jupiter said, “otherwise someone will find the treasure before us!”

“Before you?” Steve Young laughed bitterly. “You seriously think you’ll find it?”

“Let us give it a try!” asked Bob. “We have something to make up for. I never thought Mr Follows would do such a thing. He’s an old friend of my father’s and I thought he was a nice guy.”

“Nice guy?” repeated Steve Young contemptuously. “You probably think Eric Ellis is a nice guy too!”

None of the three preferred to answer that.

“I should never have taken you into my confidence!” growled Young angrily. “Do what you want!” He yanked open the door and a gust of wind swept a cloud of drizzle into the house.

After Jupiter had closed the door behind him, an eerie silence spread.

“We blew it,” Pete said. “What can we do now?”

“We’ll see,” Jupiter said confidently. “Maybe it won’t be so bad with the treasure hunters.”

... But it got bad. After breakfast, The Three Investigators went into town to fill up their fridge. Even then, the streets seemed more crowded than on the previous few days. After that, they actually wanted to go to Mr Follows to confront him, but it started raining so hard that they stopped off at the Brother Jonathan café.

Amanda hardly had time for them as she had a dozen guests to serve. “Did you read about it in the papers?” she asked in a hurry as she brought them a cup of cocoa. “All hell has broken loose here since then! People drive through town, see a café called ‘Brother Jonathan’ and think I’m an expert and can tell them all about the ship and the treasure. No one realizes that this place is just called that and has absolutely nothing to do with the ship of the same name! I’d like to know who arranged for this article!”

The Three Investigators did not have time to answer because at that moment Amanda was called by a guest who wanted to settle his bill.

When the rain had eased a little, they continued on their way to Mr Follows. Their host lived on the eastern edge of the town, where the rocky coastline merged with the wooded hinterland.

Follows was on the phone when he opened the door for them and wordlessly waved them in without interrupting his conversation. They overheard that it was about renting a holiday cottage. When Follows hung up two minutes later, he was beaming.

“I have just rented out my other cottage for a whole week... and I’ve already had enquiries for the one you are in, but of course you can stay there for the rest of the week. After all, it’s thanks to you guys that business is picking up again. Did you read the article?”

“That’s exactly what we wanted to talk to you about, sir,” Jupiter said incredulously, as Mr Follows was apparently unaware of any guilt.

“How do you come to write this article?” cried Pete. “What we told you was not meant for the public!”

“Well, you didn’t say that. Besides, the public is happy about the article!”

“They are happy?” repeated Jupiter, irritated.

“Very much so. Don’t you understand? People are coming to Sandfield! Tourists! Treasure hunters! The last few weeks have been a disaster for Sandfield because of the bad weather, but that’s over for now. And I’m sure I’m not the only one who was able to rent out his cottage this morning. The whole of Sandfield is getting something out of it.”

“So then it was just a publicity stunt for the town,” Jupiter summarized. “You made up a story to lure people here. Do you call that serious journalism?”

“It’s not made up at all,” Follows objected cheerfully. “That’s the good thing about it!”

“The gold rush is a good thing?” Pete remarked.

“This little detail appeared earlier than it should have, you’re right,” Mr Follows continued, “but just a few hours later, it corresponds to the facts—we have a gold rush. So I don’t understand why you are so upset.”

“Because you didn’t tell us a word about writing an article about this,” Pete said angrily, “and now Mr Young is like a nutcase.”

“That’s where you’re wrong. The people of Sandfield will be very grateful to him for that story. Without Steve Young’s little spinning, we wouldn’t have got out of the doldrums so quickly.”

Inside the house, the phone rang. “Sorry guys, it’s going to be another booking request. I’ve just got to—”

“Go ahead, Mr Follows,” Jupiter said. “We’ve said everything we wanted to say.”

Angry and discouraged, The Three Investigators went back to their holiday cottage. A dozen boats could be seen on the sea. People were diving and snorkelling all over the bay.

The Three Investigators decided to pay Jo a visit. When they reached the boat rental shop, five or six people were already standing in front of the wooden shop, seeking shelter from the rain under the narrow eaves.

“Look, more treasure hunters,” a young man said to his friends before turning to The Three Investigators. “You’re too late, boys, the boats are all rented out. We’re also waiting for some to become available again.” In fact, they could see that none of Jo’s boats were waiting idle on the beach anymore.

When they entered the shop and Jo saw them, her face immediately took on a guilty expression. “I know what you are going to say—I know. I’m sorry, but I had to rent out the boats. Business has been bad, and it’s been bad for weeks. This story is saving my skin right now. Imagine, they’re all booked until tonight and for tomorrow too!”

“And the treasure?” asked Bob, trying not to make it sound too reproachful.

Jo sighed and shrugged her shoulders. “It was fun looking for it, but do you really think it exists?”

“Mr Ellis thinks it exists,” Jupiter said. “The librarian at the Sandfield Public Library thinks it exists. Two divers who were after us with harpoons think so as well, and now we’re in danger of someone finding it before we do.”

“I’m sorry,” Jo repeated, sounding seriously contrite, “but I really need the money. Sorry, guys.”

After The Three Investigators had left the shop, they passed the group of waiting treasure hunters again. Jupiter said loudly to Pete: “You should probably be glad that the boats are all gone today. After your encounter with the shark, this is probably the best thing that can happen to you.”

Pete understood and nodded thoughtfully, but out of the corner of his eye he saw the treasure hunters giving each other worried looks. When they were out of earshot, Pete

chuckled. "Jupe, I didn't think you had that much malice!"

"What malice?" Jupe replied. "I was just telling the truth."

At the foot of the wooden stairs, Pete noticed that Bob looked rather annoyed. "What's wrong, Bob?" he asked.

"I'm just frustrated," Bob confessed. "Now not even Jo is on our side... and since we can't send all the treasure hunters into the desert or scare them away with shark stories, it's only a matter of time before someone beats us to it."

Silently they went back to the cottage and brooded over the problem.

"It is unlikely that any of the other treasure hunters will succeed because they don't know where to look," Jupiter said. "Ricardo and his men, on the other hand, do... but we can't outrun them anymore because we don't have a boat or equipment."

"So we can't do anything," Bob summed up, "but just wait for Ricardo to find the treasure."

Jupiter frowned. "Maybe we have to look at it from another angle. It's not just about a treasure hunt after all."

"No?" asked Pete.

"No. There's one more thing Ellis and Ricardo are involved in. When I overheard the two of them at the window, Ricardo threatened Ellis with blowing his cover." Jupiter reached for Bob's notebook and flicked through the notes. "... Especially with McCreary and Steve Young," he read out. "Whatever that was about, it didn't sound like it had anything to do with the treasure directly."

"Wait a minute, McCreary?" Pete pulled the notebook away from him and glanced at the name himself. "The name McCreary rings a bell! It was on the report I saw on Ellis's desk—Barks & McCreary."

"And you're only telling us now?" asked Jupiter reprovingly.

"My goodness, right after Ellis's phone rang, I had to run for cover. Besides, it didn't seem to mean anything... or did it?"

Jupiter frowned and pinched his lower lip. "It's hard to say, but if we can't find the treasure, maybe we should find out what Mr Ellis is mixed up in... who Ricardo is... and what Steve Young and a person named McCreary have to do with it. Ricardo is, after all, looking for the treasure on behalf of Ellis. So there's got to be some connection, and I'd like to know what it is. Consequently, there's only one way we can proceed."

"And what would that be?" asked Bob tensely.

"We'll take another look at Mr Ellis and make up our information deficit."

"Are you going to visit him again and tell him something about our college work?" asked Bob. "I don't think we'll get away with that a second time, Jupe. He already suspects we're fooling him anyway."

"I was thinking of a more private setting—just the three of us."

Pete raised his eyebrows. "You want to break into Ellis's house? Are you stupid? Ellis has a huge dog and probably a dozen alarms!"

"Have you seen an alarm system?" Jupe asked. Pete and Bob thought about it and finally shook their heads as Jupe continued: "You see? Neither did I, although I paid extra attention. As for the dog—he already knows us and with luck he won't even make a sound."

"If we're unlucky, we'll get caught and we'll all be on it," Bob stated. "After all, this is breaking into a house, and there's no Inspector Cotta here to bail us out."

"We just can't get caught," Jupiter replied. "I have reservations too, but we have a reasonable suspicion that Mr Ellis is involved in a criminal activity. Ricardo said that Ellis was already too deep to back out, and he could blow his cover. That sounds very suspicious."

What we need is proof. Fortunately, he lives alone in his house, so all we have to do is wait until he leaves.”

“And how?” asked Bob. “Are we supposed to lie in wait outside for hours in this weather? No thanks, not for me.”

“Maybe there’s a regular appointment he has,” Pete mused aloud. “A club or a meeting or something. Amanda might know.”

“Wait a minute!” Bob yelled and jumped up. He ran out of the room.

Astonished, Pete and Jupiter went after him.

Bob stood in the hallway, looked up at the ceiling and kept jumping up with an outstretched arm. From above, a short rope dangled down to pull down the flap to the attic. Finally he caught it and pulled the flap open. A ladder led up and he climbed up.

“What are you doing?” Jupiter asked in surprise, but as Bob did not answer, they followed him upstairs.

The attic was low, dusty and cold. A few empty moving boxes lay around, otherwise there was nothing up here. Bob stood at the only small window and looked out.

“I thought so!” he exclaimed enthusiastically. “There!”

When Pete and Jupiter looked out, they understood what Bob meant. Their holiday cottage was in a small hollow. From the windows on the lower floor, they could see directly to the dunes. From the attic, however, they could see over the dunes to the bay and to the rock face that formed the end of the bay to the north. Steve Young’s house could be seen nestled against the edge of the cliff. A little higher and further inland, half hidden in a small grove of conifers, stood the house of Eric Ellis!

## 11. Surveillance

Half an hour later, The Three Investigators had dragged up chairs, blankets, pillows, biscuits, orange juice and a fan heater they had found in the storeroom. Now they took turns staring through binoculars into the windows of Ellis's house, which were lit up thanks to the gloomy weather.

Ellis was at home. Time and again his small figure was clearly visible behind the curtainless windows. He spent most of the day in his study and talked on the phone a lot. He also walked around the room as if he was nervous, and kept looking out the window to the sea, probably as worried by the many boats and amateur divers as The Three Investigators.

"Now he's picking up binoculars," Pete said sometime late in the afternoon. He raised his own binoculars to his eyes and watched Ellis looking at the goings-on at sea. Slowly he panned across the bay, pausing here and there—and suddenly looked right over at them.

"Darn it!" Pete gasped and ducked his head.

"What is it?" asked Bob in alarm.

"He's looking over at us! Keep your head down, Bob!" Pete burst out and immediately, they took cover.

"Did he really see you?" asked Jupiter.

"I don't know exactly. It's possible that he didn't have our cottage in his sights. Maybe he was looking over the roof. I don't know. If he saw me, it was only for a tiny moment, but I can't really imagine it."

From now on, The Three Investigators were more cautious... but the caution was unnecessary. Ellis did not use the binoculars a second time, nor did he look out to the sea again, but neither did he leave his house.

Eventually, Jupiter, Pete and Bob sat in the attic almost all day. Their mood got worse by the hour. Every time they were about to leave and try to watch Ellis up close, rain showers pelted the roof and prevented them from doing so.

It was slowly getting dark and after they had eaten frozen pizza, Ellis was still sitting in his study talking on the phone or poring over something at his desk. Disappointed, The Three Investigators decided to go to sleep and take turns watching the house from now on—three hours each. It was decided by drawing lots that Bob would take the first shift.

For three hours, Bob fought sleep and boredom. The only interesting thing was that Ellis had not gone to sleep even at midnight.

Bob counted the minutes until the changing of the guard. He was dog-tired and wanted to go to bed as soon as possible.

At just before 1 am, the beam from car headlights suddenly felt their way up the hill to Ellis's house. A car stopped in front of the entrance, and three men got out. Bob quickly raised the binoculars to his eyes.

The men walked briskly up the stairs to the front door and disappeared from Bob's sight. Nevertheless, he saw Ellis get up and leave his study.

Two minutes later, the lights came on in the living room and Ellis led the three men inside. They spoke to each other standing up. One of them was Ricardo. The second man was

tall and strong, had a platinum blond crew cut and a boxer nose; the third was lanky and had shoulder-length stringy hair. Bob thought he recognized the two divers from the boat.

Blond Boxer pulled something out of the inside pocket of his jacket—a piece of paper—and handed it to Ellis. At a distance, of course, Bob could not make out exactly what it was, but it seemed to set Ellis off. A moment later, all four men appeared outside the house and got into the car.

“Hmm...” Bob muttered. “Where are they going at this hour?”

With the binoculars, he tracked the car as long as he could. It soon disappeared behind the trees, but Bob continued to see the reflection of the headlights. It slid down the hill to the main road, turned south—and shortly afterwards turned back towards the sea.

Bob was pretty sure that the men were on the road leading to the car park at the north end of the bay. Quick as a flash, he weighed up his options. Should he wake up his friends to walk there with them? But that might take too long, because firstly they were in deep sleep and secondly they weren’t dressed yet, unlike Bob, who was wearing a tracksuit.

Bob made a decision. He hung the binoculars around his neck and climbed down the ladder at lightning speed, slipped on his shoes, threw on his rain jacket and ran out of the house.

He didn’t feel the rain or the wind at all. Soon he had reached the wooden stairs at the end of which was Jo’s boat rental shop. He stumbled down the steps and then along the beach to the north, where a second set of steps led to the car park. Bob had almost reached it when he heard footsteps on the wooden steps above him. Cautiously, he crept closer and hid behind a rock just as the beams from two flashlights danced on the stairs.

The men came down silently. Blond Boxer was carrying a plastic heavy-duty storage crate, the kind that could be bought in DIY stores.

“Hopefully this box will be enough for all the gold coins,” Ricardo said, laughing harshly.

“Where is the boat?” Ellis wanted to know.

“Over there,” Ricardo replied and together they continued their way down to the water.

Bob waited a moment before sneaking after them. He didn’t even have to be particularly careful. It was pitch dark and the sound of the waves swallowed every other sound.

A few boats were moored at the edge of the bay. Bob hid behind one of them and watched the men load the plastic crate onto their boat. Then they pushed it into the water together, climbed in, started the engine and went out to sea, all in silence.

The light from the lamps they had with them bobbed on the water and slowly moved away from the beach. Bob followed it through the binoculars. The boat headed for a flashing buoy at the shoals near Africa Rock. There it stopped.

Bob could no longer make out what was going on, it was too dark and too far away for that. Even through the binoculars, the lamps were only tiny points of light.

Bob waited. Slowly, wetness and cold crept through his clothes. He began to freeze terribly and wondered whether he should abandon the mission. However, after an hour, the boat finally returned. It hit the sand and the men jumped out and pulled it a little further up the beach.

The two men, whose names Bob did not know, took off their diving suits, shakily dried themselves and slipped into normal clothes.

“I’m really sorry, Mr Ellis,” one of them said, “but it was just too dark...”

“Really! It’s always dark down there!”

“No, in daylight you can see a bit more.”

“You should have found something!” thundered Ellis. “We have the exact position!”

“My men will find something,” Ricardo interjected. “Tomorrow morning—when it’s bright and we’re able to dive again.”

“What do you mean by ‘able to dive again’?” asked Ellis angrily.

“Their blood is enriched with nitrogen due to the many dives. They have to wait six hours, otherwise they risk their health.”

“Six hours? But it’ll be daylight by then!”

“The sun will just have risen for an hour,” Ricardo argued.

“Long enough for crazy treasure hunters to beat us to it,” Ellis countered.

“I can’t put my people’s health at risk,” Ricardo insisted.

Ellis mumbled something unintelligible. Then he said: “At least be here on time tomorrow morning!” With that, he stomped off towards the stairs.

A little later, Ricardo and his two men followed. When Bob was sure they were gone, he crept over to Ellis’s boat. The crate was still on board. Bob took a look inside. It was empty.

“Why didn’t you wake us up?” Pete complained sleepily after Bob had shaken him and Jupiter awake and reported everything important.

“That would have taken too long,” Bob explained. “I had to hurry after all.”

“I didn’t quite understand the thing about the plastic crate,” Jupiter said. “What was in it?”

“Nothing,” said Bob. “I put it together like this—Ricardo and his men found the treasure, or a clue to it, and drove to Ellis in the middle of the night to inform him. He insisted on going out to sea immediately. They took an empty plastic crate with them to transport the treasure, but in the underwater darkness, they could not locate it.”

“Are you thinking what I’m thinking?” asked Pete.

“Most certainly,” Jupiter replied. “We’ll beat Ellis and Ricardo to it! Before the sun rises, we’ll be in the water... and then we’ll get to the treasure first!”

## 12. G.Y.

Sleep was now almost out of the question. The Three Investigators were far too excited for that. Around 3 am they were finally overcome by tiredness. Fortunately, they had set their alarm clock beforehand. It woke them up punctually at half past five. Immediately, the three were wide awake.

They hurriedly got dressed and had a quick breakfast. With a sandwich in his hand, Jupiter called Jo. As expected, he roused her from her sleep, but he managed to explain the situation to her quickly. They arranged to meet at her shop at 6 am.

Jo was on time, even though she didn't look well rested.

"I'm only doing all this because I have a guilty conscience," she greeted the three of them sullenly. "I'll go out with you, all right. I'll even accompany you on a dive, but after that, I'll get back to my business. There are already reservations for my boats."

"We don't need more than one dive," Jupiter said confidently—and hoped he was right.

They hurriedly packed up the equipment and took it to the boat. It was drizzling and cold. By the time they were ready to leave, the black night sky had turned light grey. They were about to push the boat into the water when a dark figure came running across the beach towards them. Only when it came nearer did they recognize the person as Steve Young.

"I saw you from my house," he gasped. "I'm glad I caught you! You won't believe what happened last night!"

"Good morning, Mr Young," Bob said, grinning. "Yes, we do... because we've been watching."

"You watched my house being broken into?" exclaimed Young in surprise.

"What? Oh no!"

"You've been burgled?" asked Jupiter. "What happened?"

"In the middle of the night I was woken up by a rumbling sound. I jumped out of bed. The noise had come from the attic. When I went to check, a guy jumped towards me on the stairs and knocked me down. I managed to grab him by the jacket, but he managed to tear himself away and ran out into the night. I went after him, but he was gone by then. I have not seen him before."

"What did he look like?" asked Jupiter.

"He was a huge guy, tall, blond—very blond."

"Short hair and a flat nose?" Bob enquired.

Steve Young nodded. "Do you know him?"

"That's one of Ricardo's men. I saw him last night."

"So Ellis is behind this again!" growled Young, spitting angrily into the sand.

"How did the man get into your house?" Jupiter wanted to know.

"Well, through the door. The lock is old. It's easy to pick it if you know your way around. Of course, I immediately checked to see if the guy had stolen anything. Guess what he had tampered with?" He looked at Pete.

"The box," the Second Investigator said immediately, "the one with the heirlooms."

Steve Young nodded sombrely. "It was open. Nothing was missing, but the lining on the box was ripped open on the right side. It was a wide tear."



Jupiter frowned. "Do you think there might have been something hidden behind it?"

Young shrugged his shoulders. "I never removed the lining, but I felt all round it. I was sure there was nothing there."

"Unless it was something very thin," Jupe objected, "so thin that you couldn't feel it."

"A piece of paper!" exclaimed Bob excitedly. "Mr Young, when exactly was the break-in?"

"About half past midnight."

"Bingo!" Bob remarked. "And not twenty minutes later, Ricardo and his buddies arrived at Ellis's place, and Blond Boxer showed Ellis a piece of paper when they were in his living room. Ellis got all excited and immediately arranged to leave."

Jo, who had been listening to them in silence until now, said: "You mean it was... a treasure map?"

"I had a treasure map in the house for years and didn't know it?" rumbled Young. "And now Ellis has it?" He looked at the three of them in a way as if it was their fault.

Jupiter just shrugged his shoulders. "That's how it looks." Then The Three Investigators told him what else had happened last night.

"Why are we still standing here?" Young yelled after they had finished their report. "We're losing valuable time, we have to get ahead of Ellis. Come on, come on, hurry up!"

Together they pushed the boat into the water and jumped on board. Steve Young sat down at the wheel. "Where to?"

"To the buoy at Africa Rock," Jupe said. "We don't have a treasure map, but that's the buoy where Ellis and his men went to last night. That's lucky. Without the buoy we wouldn't have a clue."

"A happy coincidence!" said Pete.

"Yes, isn't it?" murmured Jupiter, pinching his lower lip thoughtfully.

Steve Young started the engine and raced towards Africa Rock at full throttle. They ploughed through the waves a little faster than was safe. The boat bounced and rocked mightily, but it was clear to The Three Investigators that there would have been no point in trying to persuade Young to slow down.

They reached Africa Rock in record time. Young headed for the buoy and held on to it when the boat was in position. They looked towards the beach and saw that it was still deserted—neither Ricardo nor Mr Ellis were to be seen.

"Who's going down?" Jo asked the group.

"All three of us," said Jupiter. Bob and Pete agreed, and Jo also had enough confidence in the three boys by now that she allowed them to dive by themselves.

"No fear of sharks now?" Jupiter asked the Second Investigator after they had donned and checked their equipment.

"No problem this time," Pete replied calmly. "They wouldn't attack me anyway."

"How so?"

"Since you are coming, you have much more to offer them," Pete poked Jupiter in the stomach, before plopping himself into the water.

They had decided to stay close together, swimming side by side. In this way, they could systematically scan the seabed around the buoy. Eventually, they slid into the depths and soon switched on their lamps. The weak daylight was of little use to them at this depth. Slowly, in order to consume as little air as possible, they swam back and forth two metres above the sandy seabed.

A ling cod, which had been crouching invisibly at the bottom, took flight in a cloud of sand. Pete watched it for a while and therefore did not notice that Bob, who was swimming

on the far right, suddenly waved his lamp excitedly. Then he pointed to the seabed and directed his lamp at what Pete at first thought was a large rock.

Immediately, Jupiter and Pete swam towards Bob. When Pete went closer, he saw that it was not a rock but the bulge of a wooden chest lid, half-sunk into the loose sand.

The three boys tried to dig out the chest, but in the process they stirred up so much sand that they couldn't see anything for a while. Finally, two brass handles appeared. With their combined efforts, they managed to pull the chest out of the sand. Pete tried to open the lid, but it was locked. Nevertheless, there was no doubt in his mind—they had discovered the treasure!

Five minutes later, The Three Investigators appeared beside the boat, snorting.

"So?" asked Young immediately. "Did you find the treasure?"

"We have found something," Jupiter confirmed, "but we don't know what it is yet."

He threw one end of the rope on board before setting about climbing into the boat himself. They had tied the other end to the handles of the chest. There had been no other way to retrieve it.

"Really?" exclaimed Jo excitedly, helping them up the boat. "Tell us!"

"A chest. You will see it in a moment," Jupe said. "We can pull it up together."

However, Steve Young had already started pulling. A little later, the wooden lid appeared.

The chest was about the size of a laundry basket and surprisingly heavy as soon as they pulled it out of the water. It had rusty iron fittings and a lock. The wood was black and water ran out of the cracks between the wooden boards that had simply been cobbled together.

Steve Young squatted reverently in front of the chest and gently stroked the wet wood. "My great-uncle's treasure! Finally!"

"Wait and see," Jupiter replied.

Young sparkled wildly at him. "What are you trying to say?"

"First we have to open the chest. Who knows what's in it anyway. Besides, it's not said that the chest even belonged to your great-uncle."

"But Jupe, look!" said Bob, tapping a spot in the lid of the chest.

They had not seen it under water, but now they could see that characters had been carved into the wood—'G.Y.'

"Geoffrey Young," Pete said.

"Well," Jo said, but her gaze was not on the chest but on the beach. "We have company."

By now it was daylight. A good dozen people had gathered on the beach.

"Who are those people?" asked Pete in amazement. "They're not all Ellis's men, are they?"

Bob looked through the binoculars. "No. Ellis isn't there at all... but I recognize one of the treasure hunters from yesterday... No, two of them, in fact... and reporters! At least that's what they look like, wearing huge cameras around their necks. It feels like they're all looking in our direction—like they're waiting for us."

"But that can't be," Pete said. "How would they know that we found something?"

"In any case, they're not going to get my treasure!" Steve Young barked.

However, they had no choice but to head for the beach.

When they pulled the boat ashore, it became clear that the reporters had indeed been waiting for them. Immediately, one of the men approached them. He wore a red rain jacket and held a microphone in his hand. A gum-chewing photographer stood right next to him and started snapping.

“Good morning, Snow from the *San Francisco Chronicle*. We’re doing a feature on the treasure-hunting fever that has broken out in Sandfield.”

“Have fun then,” Jupiter replied coolly.

“You’ve just been diving there, haven’t you? And I see you found something too.” The man pointed to the chest that Jo was still trying to hide with her body.

“There are fish hooks and bait in there,” she now claimed.

“But through the telephoto lens I could see how you pulled the chest out of the water,” the photographer remarked and immediately started snapping again.

In the meantime, other reporters were also there and taking photos and videos, and the number of onlookers was growing.

“Is that Geoffrey Young’s treasure?” someone asked.

“That’s none of your damn business!” shouted Young into the crowd.

“But Mr Young!” said the man from the *San Francisco Chronicle* reprovingly. “You are Mr Young, aren’t you? The great-nephew of the legendary Geoffrey Young?”

“How do you know?”

“Please. I am a reporter. Would you open the chest for us right now? The world must know about this sensational find!”

At that moment, another man stepped out of the group, he was short, grey-haired and wore a black coat. “Excuse me, I am Richard Adams, the director of the Eureka museum. I must inform you that the treasure is in no way yours, Mr Young. It is, by law, the property of the state until further notice.”

“Are you all completely deranged?” shouted Steve Young, standing in front of the boat with his arms outstretched. “The treasure is mine and nobody else’s!”

Mr Adams tried to calm Young down, but he did not succeed. The photographer took a lot of photos and everything was recorded on video.

“Jupe, this is all getting completely out of hand,” Pete murmured to the First Investigator.

Jupiter nodded sombrely. “And that’s why we’re going to put an end to it now. Come on, fellas, let’s heave the chest out of the boat.”

“And then what?” Pete asked.

“You’ll see.”

Unnoticed by Young, Mr Adams and the reporters, The Three Investigators set to work. Only when the chest landed with a dull sound in the wet sand between those present did everyone look up.

“Jupiter, what are you doing?” asked Steve Young belligerently.

“We should open the chest, Mr Young,” Jupiter said. “The gentlemen won’t rest until we do anyway... or do you think you could tuck the chest under your arm and run away?”

“What’s in the chest is nobody’s business, except mine!” Young exclaimed.

“You may think so, but the fact is that the gentlemen from the newspaper will not leave until they get their photos and their story... Besides that, the museum director will want to supervise the opening of the chest.”

“The boy is very right about that!” the reporter in the red rain jacket agreed with him.

Mr Young was about to protest, but by then Jo was already saying: “I’ll go to the shop and get some tools.”

When she was back with a crowbar in her hand, Young stood in her way. “You’re not doing it, Jo!”

“Steve, I beg you...” Jo replied. “You will not be wronged. No one will take your treasure away from you if it is rightfully yours.”

“Certainly not,” Mr Adams from the museum hastened to say.

Young wanted to say something back, but Jo had already applied the chisel. She pushed it down with all her might. The lock popped open.

The crowd thronged around them. Cameras clicked and flashes went off as Jo slowly opened the lid.

“Gold!” Pete groaned.

### 13. A Bunch of Fools

In the chest were sparkling lumps of gold, as big as chicken eggs. The crowd was in an uproar, the photographers snapped photos incessantly. Then Jupiter stepped forward and took out one of the smaller lumps. He lifted it to his mouth and bit at it with his molars.

“Ha! A wonderful picture—do it again, boy!” a photographer urged him.

However, Jupiter paid no attention to him. He took a swing and hurled the chunk back into the chest with all his might. A small piece broke off.

“I thought so,” Jupiter said lightly. “It’s not gold, but pyrite—also called fool’s gold. It’s pretty worthless. Visually, gold and pyrite can be mistaken for each other. However, gold is much softer and wouldn’t splinter whereas pyrite is brittle and can easily break—as you just saw.”

“But... but it can’t be!” stammered Steve Young. “Are you sure?”

Jupiter nodded. All those present talked in confusion.

“But Jupe...” Pete murmured, “we were sure there was a gold treasure!”

The reporter overheard this and laughed. “Geoffrey Young did a good job of making everyone believe in his gold treasure, didn’t he? I spoke to the older people in Sandfield who still knew him. Everyone agreed that Young liked to keep his mouth pretty full and you never knew which of his adventure stories were true and which he had just made up. He seems to have been a joker too. Apparently he had a chest full of fool’s gold on board, and then he spread the rumour that he had found gold from the *Brother Jonathan*. Too bad he’s not here for the punch line!” He laughed again.

Pete, Bob and Jo did not feel like laughing at all. Steve Young squatted on the edge of the boat and stared into space. Only Jupiter seemed strangely unaffected by all this. “We’ll be going now,” he said and turned towards the boat rental shop.

“Wait a minute!” the reporter held him back. “It’s a good story anyway. Mind if I do a quick interview with you?”

“Yes,” Pete replied gruffly. “Leave us alone!”

Jupe raised his hand to stop Pete and said to the reporter: “Not at all.”

To Bob’s and Pete’s surprise, Jupe willingly answered the reporter’s questions. He openly admitted how disappointed he was with the outcome of the treasure hunt, and how much he had actually believed in finding a real gold treasure.

When the reporters had had enough and wanted to ask Steve Young questions, he could not be found. It seemed that he had stealthily made his escape. There were a few more photos, then the crowd slowly dispersed.

“Thanks, guys,” the reporter said. “I have to go back to the newsroom and write the article. You can read it tomorrow.”

“Sure... we’re looking forward to it,” Pete said sarcastically.

When everyone had gone, Jupiter sighed. “At last this silly game is over.”

“Silly game?” cried Pete. “That wasn’t a game, Jupe! Do you know that from tomorrow, we’ll look like a bunch of fools? Why were you even talking to them? We should have just left!”

“No. We had to play the game. That was the price we paid for being in the driver’s seat. Come, fellas, we should urgently retreat for a meeting.”

“So, Jupe, spit it out!” demanded Pete when they were back in the holiday cottage and sat down at the kitchen table. “There’s something you’re not telling us—as usual...”

“Yeah,” Bob agreed, “you know something we don’t, right?”

Jupiter nodded. “Didn’t anything seem strange to you?”

“We found a treasure chest, but there was no treasure inside,” Pete said in frustration. “That seemed strange to me... very much so.”

“And the chest itself?”

Pete shrugged his shoulders in perplexity.

“Didn’t it seem pretty new to you?” Jupe continued probing.

“New?” Pete laughed. “The wood was black and the fittings were so rusty that you probably wouldn’t have been able to get the lock open even with the right key.”

“I agree with you there... but did the chest really look like it had been in the water for fifty years?”

“I think so,” Pete replied.

“I don’t think so.”

“It was embedded deep in the sand!” Pete argued.

“But there were no shells on it,” Bob interjected, “and no seaweed... and nothing else either. About the carved initials, they caught my eye right away—and that’s because they were lighter than the rest of the wood.”

“That’s normal when you carve something somewhere,” Pete said.

“But not after fifty years in the water,” Jupe said. “The letters should have been as black and swollen as the rest of the wood. In fact, they looked far too fresh.”

Pete frowned. “What about the rust?”

“Go to our salvage yard and look at old door fittings, freight boxes or anything else with iron,” Jupiter said. “You’ll find that half of them are rusted.”

“You... you mean someone bought an old rusty wooden chest, put fool’s gold in it and then sank it? Even partially buried it in the sand?”

“Not someone,” Jupiter contradicted, “but Eric Ellis. The whole story doesn’t add up from beginning to end. Geoffrey Young is supposed to have packed pyrite in a chest and stowed it on his ship, thinking that one day it would sink with the *Eureka* and play a trick on people with the story about a real gold treasure? I beg you—this lacks all logic!”

“But—” Pete began.

“I’ll tell you how it really was—yesterday afternoon we were watching Eric Ellis through binoculars. For a brief moment, Pete feared Ellis might have seen us through his own binoculars. Rightly so... He saw us.”

“But if he did, it was only for half a second at most,” Pete objected. “He couldn’t possibly have recognized us.”

“No, but he knows this cottage. It probably only cost him one phone call—” Jupiter stood up abruptly and went to the phone.

“Good afternoon, Mr Follows. This is Jupiter Jones speaking. I just have a quick question—did Mr Ellis by any chance call you yesterday?” Jupiter listened intently for a minute. “I see,” he then said. “Thank you very much. Goodbye!” He hung up.

“Mr Follows had several enquiries about his holiday cottages yesterday,” Jupiter told his friends. “One of the calls was from Eric Ellis who asked Mr Follows if this very cottage we

are in was still available for rent as a friend of his was looking for accommodation... Of course, that's nonsense coming from someone who owns two hotels himself.

"During a short chat, Ellis also asked who was staying here. From Follows's answer, Ellis must have realized that we weren't at his place to do research for a geography project, instead we were looking for the treasure. So Ellis had to do something—not only for our sake, but also because of the countless treasure hunters that now swarmed the bay. He had to get rid of all of us in one fell swoop so that no one would find the treasure before him. What could be more obvious—"

"—Than to have the treasure turn up really quickly!" Bob finished the sentence. "Brilliant, Juve!"

"You mean Ellis staged all this?" cried Pete.

Jupiter began to walk thoughtfully up and down the room. "Ellis suspected that we were tailing him. He's been on the phone all day—probably to find a mountain of fool's gold and an old chest with as many rusty fittings as possible. Then there was that plastic crate. It was not empty when it was brought to the boat at night. The fake treasure chest was in it.

"Just as Ellis's men were coming down the stairs, Ricardo let it slip by saying that he hoped the crate was big enough for all the gold coins, so that a possible secret observer wouldn't get the wrong—that is, the right—ideas in view of the plastic crate." The First Investigator paused. "Then there was the break-in at Steve Young's. How would anyone suddenly know that there was a treasure map and where it was hidden?" Jupiter paused again for effect, looking slowly from Bob to Pete.

"Can you get on with it?" Pete said impatiently. "How did he know?"

"He didn't know, Pete. In fact, there was no treasure map. The burglar merely tore the velvet lining in the box to make it look like he found a treasure map, and to make the rest of the story more believable. More so, if you remember, the chest happened to be in a spot that you could immediately find, Bob, despite the distance and the darkness—right next to a flashing buoy.

"What about all those reporters on the beach this morning? Someone must have alerted them. Sure, they had all read the story in the *Times-Standard* yesterday. However, there were too many reporters there for my liking. Even the museum director was there! How about that? Also, they were all there at the right time—namely in the one hour made available to us by the claim that Ricardo's people couldn't dive so early in the morning.

"That conversation you overheard on the beach at night, Bob—that was arranged. Now Ellis did not only get rid of us, but also of all the other treasure hunters. The supposed treasure's been found. It's just worthless. There were plenty of witnesses on the beach. The news should have spread throughout Sandfield by now. This afternoon, the adventurers will have disappeared as suddenly as they appeared... and Ellis will have a clear run again."

"Gosh, Juve," Pete exclaimed enthusiastically. "Then there is a real treasure after all! We have to go and look for it right away!"

However, Juve slowly shook his head. "We will search—not for the treasure but for information. We'll do what we were planning to do yesterday but didn't get the chance to do."

Bob nodded grimly. "Continue watching Ellis..."

## 14. Drenched in Sweat

Once again, The Three Investigators took up post in the attic and observed Ellis's property from there.

At first, it looked as if they would have no luck once again. However, late at noon, Ellis left his house, got into his car and drove away. Through the binoculars, Bob could see the car turn onto the main road, then his view was blocked by the rooftops of Sandfield.

"Let's go, Pete!" shouted Jupiter. "We have to hurry. If Ellis is going somewhere for lunch, that would give us about an hour."

They already had their shoes on, their jackets were ready, as was the backpack with their detective equipment that they had brought with them to Sandfield. They decided that it was more convenient to use walkie-talkies for communications than mobile phones.

Bob stayed where he was. "Off you go guys, I'll contact you immediately when I see Ellis heading back! Good luck!"

Jupe and Pete rushed out of the house, jumped into the car and crossed Sandfield heading north until they came to the turn-off that led up to Ellis's house. Pete parked his car nearby and they hurried up the hill the same way they had done three days before. Jupiter tried the walkie-talkie connection.

"This is First, come in!"

"This is Third, I hear you clearly!"

"We are almost at the house."

"I can hear you—you're wheezing quite a bit. Everything is fine here. No special incidents. Ah, wait, now I can see you."

Pete and Jupiter had reached the edge of the conifer grove. In front of them was the gravel-strewn driveway with the roundabout. Behind it was Eric Ellis's house. Through a gap in the tree cover they could see the dune landscape in which their holiday cottage lay. The roof with the small window, however, could only be made out as a speck at a distance. Nevertheless, they waved to Bob.

Then they approached the house. They knew that no one was there, but it was still a strange feeling to be creeping around in broad daylight. They circled the house once, but everywhere the windows and doors were closed. Only on the first floor was a window ajar.

"Bummer," Jupiter muttered. "We can't get in that easily."

"Maybe I can pick the door lock," Pete mused. "I'll have a look." However, a brief inspection of the lock ended soberingly. "It's a safety lock. I can't do much with my lock picks."

"The window it is, then," Jupiter said. "Do you think you can climb up there?"

Pete grimaced. "I don't suppose there's anything else I can do... or would you like to try?" He poked Jupiter in the stomach. "There's a pipe leading up to the gutter. I might be able to climb up that." He walked over and tried to find a foothold but it was too slippery and his feet kept slipping.

Jupiter looked at the house again from a distance. "There's a ledge underneath the windows on the first floor that goes all the way around. It looks wide enough to stand on."

"You mean for me..."



Jupiter ignored the remark. “You could climb up at another point, get on the ledge and then to the window.”

On the other side of the house, a climbing plant grew up the wall on a trellis. Pete tried whether the plant and the scaffolding could bear his weight. It worked. Soon he had reached the top of the ledge. “It’s just wide enough to stand on. Hopefully it will hold.”

Carefully, Pete put his left foot on it. Then his right. With his back to the wall, arms outstretched and groping for a foothold, he pushed himself sideways bit by bit. This went well until he reached the corner of the house.

“What now?” he called down to Jupiter.

“You have to go around the corner!”

“Easy for you to say—”

“From down here it looks quite simple,” Juve remarked. “Go for it, Pete!”

“What if I fall?”

“Then I’ll catch you.”

Slowly, Pete pushed himself around the corner. Although it was cold, sweat stood on his forehead. Then he finally made it. The last stretch to the window seemed easy. He crouched down, got hold of the bottom edge of the window and pulled it up until the window was opened wide enough. Pete climbed through it into a bedroom.

Instantly, the dog in the house began to bark.

“Oh no!” Pete muttered and carefully went to the door. He stepped out into the hallway. At the bottom of the stairs stood Geoffrey, yapping.

“It’s all right, doggie,” Pete said soothingly. “Good boy, Geoffrey, good boy!”

He had once heard that dogs could sense fear in their opponents, so he tried not to be... but that was easier said than done. He pulled a sausage he had brought specially out of his jacket pocket, broke it in half and threw one piece down the stairs. Immediately, Geoffrey pounced on the treat and greedily gobbled it down. Now he no longer barked and Pete dared to go down a few steps.

Suddenly, Geoffrey shot towards him—so fast that Pete could no longer run away. But when the huge dog stood in front of him, he just looked at Pete expectantly—and wagged his tail. Pete gave him the other half of the sausage and patted him on the head. “That’s it, Geoffrey. We’re friends now, okay?”

He went down the stairs and to the front door, where Jupiter had been waiting impatiently. As he opened it, a voice suddenly spoke to them and they both flinched.

“Third to First. Juve, what’s going on with you? You didn’t answer. I just saw a figure on the wall of the house. Was that Pete?”

Jupiter sighed with relief and picked up the walkie-talkie. “First to Third. Yes, that was Pete. Operation successful. We’re in. From now on, only report in emergencies, okay?”

“Understood. Over.”

“Well done, Pete,” Jupiter praised and entered the house. “What is Geoffrey doing?”

“He is my best mate now.”

Jupiter nodded. “We have no time to lose. Let’s go!”

Determined, Jupiter went into the study, while Pete’s task was to take another look at all the other rooms. However, he found nothing out of the ordinary on the ground floor as well as on the first floor. He even took a look in the basement, but without any result.

Geoffrey trotted obediently beside him the whole time, hoping for another piece of sausage. “A fine watchdog you are,” Pete murmured and made his way to Jupiter.

In the meantime, the First Investigator had found the Barks & McCreary report portfolio on Ellis’s desk and was leafing through it.

“Do you understand any of this report?” Pete asked.

“Not everything, but the main thing is exactly what Mr Ellis has already told us—the report confirms that the edge of the cliff is at risk of erosion. It could slide off, which is why construction is not allowed there, at least until the cliff is stabilized. Even then, the type of construction allowed is restricted. So there’s nothing new in here.”

“I still don’t quite understand,” Pete wondered aloud. “Mr Ellis said that he had reworked plans to build on his own land. Do you think he genuinely wants to help Steve Young out of a potential disaster?”

“We have to give Mr Ellis the benefit of doubt,” Jupe replied. “Perhaps he wouldn’t want any disaster to occur so near his resort. Also, Steve Young’s house might obstruct the landscape he envisages for his resort. Mr Ellis is filthy rich. He could afford to buy more land, in view of the huge revenue that could be generated from his planned project.”

Jupiter put the report portfolio back on the desk and pointed to the small wooden box Pete had already looked at last time.

“The envelopes with the money for Ricardo and Raya that you mentioned are still there. I also found a folder with bank statements, but there was nothing suspicious. There is no reference of Ricardo there, and Barks & McCreary were paid for the geotechnical assessment—that’s it... and I didn’t find the key to the desk drawer. Do you think you could—”

“Already on it,” Pete said, squatting in front of the desk, pulling his lock pick set out of his pocket and getting to work.

Pete poked around in the drawer lock with his lock picks for a while. Finally, the locking mechanism gave way with a click.

A loud ringing sounded.

Jupiter winced.

Pete laughed. “Take it easy, Jupe. It sounds like an alarm system, but it’s just the phone. Why someone always calls at the moment I’m busy with this drawer is beyond me.”

Jupiter breathed a sigh of relief. “I’d love to know who that is... but I’m afraid my acting talent isn’t good enough to convince anyone I’m Eric Ellis.”

“This is Eric Ellis,” said a distorted voice. “I am not at home at the moment. Please leave a message.” It beeped.

Pete and Jupiter listened.

“Ellis, it’s Ricardo. For crying out loud, I can’t get you on your mobile phone, and you are now not at home! Anyway, we have finally succeeded! We have found the wreck! The *Elaine* is quite a bit further east than we thought, much closer to the coast. The tidal currents must have driven her there after I got caught in the storm. All the better, then it’s not so far to the cave. My people—”

“Third to First!” suddenly Bob’s voice squawked from the walkie-talkie. “Alert! Ellis is coming back! He’s just turned off the main road. Alert!”

“Not now!” hissed Jupiter angrily, trying to concentrate on Ricardo’s message.

“—Everything is already prepared. Call me so we can set up a time for the big bang—”

“Jupe, do you read me? Come in, for goodness’ sake!”

There was a click on the line. Ricardo had hung up.

Frustrated, Jupiter raised the walkie-talkie to his mouth. “First here. We heard you, Bob. Already on the way out!”

“You have one minute at the most. Hurry up!”

Jupiter switched off the walkie-talkie. “Did you understand the rest of the message, Pete?”

“No.” He pointed to the play button on the answering machine, which now had a red light flashing. “We could listen to it but then the light would stop flashing. Besides, we don’t have any more time, we have to go!”

Jupiter pulled open the desk drawer.

“Jupe, are you going to search the drawer now?”

“That’s why we came here. If we were to abort the mission before it had produced satisfactory results, we would have exposed ourselves to an unnecessary risk—”

“Okay, so don’t waste any more time, Jupe—just do it!”

There were more papers in the drawer, which Jupiter glanced through. A business card fell into his hand:

*RICARDO YARBROUGH*

*BAYVIEW DECONSTRUCTION*

The card also had an address in San Francisco, a telephone number and a logo that looked like a wrecking ball. Jupiter memorized the information and put the business card back.

“Jupe, that will do,” Pete urged impatiently. He stood at the window and looked outside in anticipation of Ellis’s Bentley. “Can we go now, please?”

“One second.”

“Not a second more,” Pete said as he watched the car coming up the driveway. “Ellis is back!”

## 15. Rescue Mission

Pete grabbed the First Investigator by the upper arm. Jupiter was just able to push the drawer shut before he was pulled out into the hallway. It was then that they heard the crunch of gravel. Shortly afterwards, the car stopped in front of the house, then the slamming of the car door could be heard.

“We can’t get out through the front door,” Jupiter said hurriedly. “We have to try somewhere else!”

They ran into the living room through whose large windows they had watched Ellis on the first evening. Pete tried to open the first window he saw. It was stuck. The second one was stuck too... so was the third.

“Hurry up, Pete!” urged Jupiter. “He has to be here any second!”

Then Pete discovered the little latch that kept the window closed. He flipped it over and pushed it up. “Get out now!” he hissed.

Jupiter climbed out first. He landed ungently in a flower bed. Pete was right behind him. Then he heard the front door. A sharp breeze tugged at him. He reached for the window and closed it. Hastily they covered their tracks in the flower bed, then ran towards the edge of the forest.

They reached the sheltering trees not a second too soon, because at that moment, the light was switched on in the living room. Pete saw Ellis’s figure behind the window.

“Bummer!”

“What is it?” asked Jupiter in alarm. “Did he see us?”

“No, but he looks so suspicious. He must have felt the draught when he opened the front door. The window was still open then. He felt something, I’m sure of it.”

“He will notice more,” Jupiter was convinced, “especially that his desk drawer is not locked. We should leave as soon as possible!”

In a wide arc, they crept back to the road, got into Pete’s car and drove away.

“*Elaine*?” asked Bob.

“*Elaine*,” Jupiter confirmed.

“*Elaine*,” Pete also said. “At least that part we still understood clearly. That was before you interrupted.”

“I beg your pardon,” Bob said. “Next time, of course, I will not contact you when you are about to be caught. So the wreck Ellis and Ricardo are looking for is called *Elaine*.”

“That’s what it looks like,” Jupe replied.

“But I thought it was called *Eureka*.”

“That’s what we thought until now,” Jupiter added.

“Then I’m afraid I don’t understand what it’s all about.”

“Take comfort, Bob, you’re not the only one,” Pete said.

“And what was that about the cave?”

“I don’t know,” said Pete. “That’s exactly where you interrupted.”

“I’ve been thinking—” Jupiter announced.

“You don’t say!” Pete remarked.

“Do you remember our first conversation with Jo? She told us that hardly anyone comes to rent boats or surfboards because of the weather, and that the storm last Wednesday had even driven away her most fearless customers.”

“The things you remember...” Pete marvelled.

“And when I overheard Ellis and Ricardo at the window that first night, Ellis said they’d been looking for the wreck since Thursday.”

“Really? The things you remember!” repeated Pete.

“And when Ricardo spoke on Ellis’s answering machine earlier, he also mentioned a storm he’d been caught in—him, not Geoffrey Young or anyone else. The logical conclusion is—last Wednesday, Ricardo got caught in the storm with a boat or ship called *Elaine* and sank. They’ve been searching for the wreck ever since—for the *Elaine*, not the *Eureka*, and therefore, logically, not for a treasure of gold—but something else entirely.”

“So there is no treasure after all?” asked Pete disappointedly.

“Maybe it’s not what we thought to be, but there is something that was on board the *Elaine*—something Ellis wants desperately and doesn’t want anyone else to find. We don’t know what it is, unfortunately—but we may be able to find out.”

“How do we do that?” asked Bob.

“By addressing the question of what kind of business Ellis and Ricardo are involved in. Ricardo threatened Ellis with blowing the whistle on him. For what? We know Ellis is a hotelier, but what does Ricardo actually do?”

Bob shrugged his shoulders in perplexity. “How are we supposed to find that out?”

Now the First Investigator smiled. “In Ellis’s drawer was a business card from Ricardo. His last name is Yarbrough and he works for a company called Bayview Deconstruction. Judging by the company name and the design of the card, it’s a deconstruction company.”

“Deconstruction?” asked Pete.

“They tear down buildings,” Jupiter explained, “and I’m going to make a call there now.”

“You remember the number?” asked Pete in surprise.

“Of course, Pete.”

Jupiter went to the telephone. Pete and Bob rushed to him and listened in.

“Bayview Deconstruction,” a female voice announced.

“Good afternoon, my name is Jonathan Swift,” Jupiter said in a disguised voice. He sounded almost like an adult. “I’d like to speak to Mr Yarbrough.”

“Ricardo Yarbrough?”

“That’s right.”

“One moment, please,” she replied. Then the on-hold music came on.

“Geez, Jupe, what if he answers now?” murmured Pete nervously.

“He can’t do that at all. Bayview Deconstruction is in San Francisco but Ricardo is here in Sandfield.”

Pete frowned. “So who will you be connected to then?”

“We’ll know in a minute.”

“This is Jackson Cooper. I’m the general manager of Bayview Deconstruction. Who am I speaking to?”

“Jonathan Swift,” Jupiter repeated. “I actually wanted to speak to Ricardo Yarbrough.”

“Do you know Mr Yarbrough?”

“Knowing him would be too much to say, but I got hold of his business card and I’m calling because I’m researching deconstruction companies.”

“Are you a journalist?”

“Something like that.”

“Look, Mr Swift, Mr Yarbrough no longer works for us, but you would be a great help to us if you could tell us where and when you last saw him.”

“I don’t quite understand.”

“Mr Yarbrough is wanted by the police,” Mr Cooper said.

“The police? But why?”

Mr Cooper hesitated.

“I know a few things about Mr Yarbrough,” Jupiter continued. “Maybe I can help the police if you tell me what it’s about.”

“All right.” Cooper sounded as if he was secretly glad for the opportunity. “One of the things our company does is large demolitions and blowing up buildings or bridges. Mr Yarbrough was our blaster. He replaced a long-time employee who retired just a few months ago. Some time later, we noticed there were strange irregularities in our stockpiles. It soon turned out that Yarbrough had been stealing explosives and detonators from our warehouse. When we got on to him, he made a run for it.”

“He doesn’t seem to have been very clever with those thefts,” Jupiter said.

“That was probably not his intention either because I learned from the police that this is not the first case of this kind. Mr Yarbrough has worked for various deconstruction companies all over the country. He always got the job of blaster and his qualifications are genuine. With it, he had access to explosives immediately. However, each time after a few weeks, he disappeared... together with considerable quantities of explosives.”

“Why would someone steal explosives?”

“There’s a black market for that!” replied Mr Cooper, horrified. “Don’t ask me what for, I don’t really want to know. Anyway, the police are extremely alarmed and are trying to find Yarbrough—after all, that man is dangerous! But so far they have no leads. If you can tell me where you met him, that would be a great help.”

“I’m sorry, sir, I can’t tell you that right now, but I will help you and the police, I promise. Thank you very much for the information.”

“But—” Jupiter hung up.

“Explosives?” asked Bob. “Do you think this has anything to do with our case?”

The First Investigator shook his head slowly. “I don’t know, Bob... but I’d like to make another call.” Again Jupiter dialled a number from his head.

“Barks & McCreary, Miller speaking, what can I do for you?”

“This is Jonathan Swift. I’d like to speak to Mr McCreary.”

“There is no Mr McCreary here, sir, just a Mrs Raya McCreary. What is this about?”

“Oh,” said Jupiter, “then I must have made a mistake. I’m sorry. Goodbye.” He hung up.

“Raya McCreary,” he repeated.

“Raya was the name written on the envelope of cash in Ellis’s box!” Pete recalled.

“And all this time, I thought that was the name of one of the two divers working for Ricardo,” Juve said, “and that Ellis was going to pay them both in cash for finding the wreck. I was wrong.”

Pete raised his hands in a gesture of perplexity. “It’s all too complicated for me.”

“But not to me,” Bob said. “You said you found a funds transfer to Barks & McCreary in the bank statements, Juve.”

The First Investigator nodded. “And that’s about the sum the assessment cost—as I learned from the report portfolio.”

“But more money is flowing,” Bob continued, “and it should be in cash so that it doesn’t show up on the bank statements. Bribe money, perhaps... or payment for some criminal activity.”

Jupiter nodded. “Ellis was going to pay Ricardo to recover the *Elaine*. He’s a man who is a trained blaster and has considerable quantities of explosives. Further, Mr Ellis wanted to pay Raya McCreary—the woman who did a geotechnical assessment for him. The report says that Steve Young lives on a piece of land prone to erosion. However, the money in the envelope wasn’t payment for the report because that had already been done by bank transfer... so it’s for something else...” Jupiter said with widened eyes, “for forging the report, for example!”

He jumped up so suddenly that Pete and Bob winced. “We have to do something, fellas, and we have to do it now! I hope I’m wrong... but if I’m not, then every minute counts!”

When The Three Investigators reached Jo Hilton’s boat rental shop, the shop was locked and everything was dark behind the windows. No one was to be seen.

“Why isn’t she in her shop?” asked Pete, looking at his watch. “It should still be open at this time.”

“After our performance on the beach this morning, the rush on her boat rental shop must have abruptly subsided,” Bob surmised. “She probably took the rest of the day off.”

“Why don’t you call her then?” Pete asked.

“Too late! By the time she gets here, it’ll be too late,” Jupiter said, pointing out to sea. “Do you see what I see?”

Pete narrowed his eyes. “There’s a boat going out—Ellis’s boat! And there are three people on board!”

“Ricardo and his men,” Bob was convinced. “They want to dive for the wreck.”

“And they know where it is,” Jupiter said gloomily. “It shouldn’t be long before they have what they’re looking for. We can’t beat them to it.”

“Then we’ll lie in wait!” shouted Pete. “If they show up with their loot, we’ll call the police. They can catch the guys then.”

Jupiter nodded. “That will be best, Pete.” He looked over at the door of the boat rental shop. “Did you bring your lock pick set?”

Pete tapped his trouser pocket. “Always.”

“Do you think you can get this open?”

Pete looked at him, startled. “You want to break into Jo’s shop?”

“I don’t want to break in, I want to set up our observation post there. Jo has binoculars in the shop. From her window, you can watch the boat perfectly without being seen. I’m sure Jo would help us immediately if she were here. It’s not like we’re going to break anything.”

Pete hesitated, but then nodded. “All right, you’re probably right.”

The lock was so simple that the Second Investigator had it picked after only a few seconds. With a somewhat uneasy feeling, The Three Investigators entered the shop.

“Don’t switch on the lights,” Bob warned. “We cannot let Ricardo and company know we are here.” He picked out a pair of binoculars lying on a shop shelf and went to the window.

“I see them. All three are wearing diving suits. They are now halfway to Africa Rock... Hold on! They are stopping... and dropping an anchor. They seem to have reached their destination already.”

“Ricardo said that the current had pushed the wreck much closer to the shore than expected,” Jupiter recalled.

“Now they’re going into the water—all three of them!”

“Really?” Pete wondered, peering outside. “Strange that no one stays on board the boat, isn’t it?”

“Maybe they need all three of them to salvage the cargo,” Jupiter speculated.

They waited... and waited... Actually, the three men were supposed to reappear soon, but nothing happened.

“Strange,” Bob said. “I thought Ricardo knew where the wreck was. They should be back by now.”

“It’s not so easy to find a certain spot on the water again,” Jupiter pointed out, although he also found it strange.

After half an hour, The Three Investigators became restless.

“Why don’t they show up?” asked Bob. “Something is not right!”

“Ten minutes,” Jupiter said. “I’ll give them ten minutes. Blond Boxer is a big, strong man. He will have emptied his scuba tank the quickest of the three. His air supply should actually be used up soon.”

However, the ten minutes also passed without anything happening.

“Something happened down there,” Jupiter was finally convinced.

“Something happened?” asked Pete in alarm. “But what? A diving accident?”

“I don’t know, but something has gone wrong. We have to do something!” Jupe exclaimed.

“What are you going to do?” asked Bob.

“We’re diving after them.”

“What?” cried Pete. “Why can’t we just call the police?”

“By the time they get here and realizes what’s going on, it might be too late. You and I will go down, Pete. Bob, you stay here, notify the police and report to them when they arrive.”

There was no time for discussion. Jupiter and Pete hurriedly gathered their diving gear and put it on. Fortunately, they were already used to this by now. With the scuba tanks and fins under their arms, they nodded to Bob once more.

“Be careful!” said Bob.

Jupe and Pete ran out and up the beach to its northern end where the cliff began and on which Steve Young’s house was situated. Ricardo’s moored boat was about two hundred metres from the shore. The plan was to swim under water and search for the men along the way there.

Jupiter was panting and sweating when they finally reached the rocks that marked the end of the beach. Nevertheless, he wasted no time and immediately slipped into his fins. They checked each other’s equipment, then waddled into the water. It quickly got deeper so that they could soon swim under water.

As soon as they could not feel the ground under their feet, Jupiter asked: “Ready, Pete?”

“Ready!” Pete replied.

With that, both of them began their mission under water.



## 16. Countdown!

After Bob had called the police, he called Jo and explained the situation to her. Then he left the boat rental shop and hurried up the beach, following the footsteps of Jupiter and Pete, until he reached the north end. There he would wait for Jo and the police as arranged.

The wind whipped fine, cold rain into his face while he stared out to sea, hoping every second to see his friends reappear. The waves formed a lead-grey and black billowing carpet. Bob constantly saw heads appearing where there were none.

He glanced at his watch. By now Jupiter and Pete had been under water for fifteen minutes... and there was still no sign of Ricardo and his men.

When he suddenly heard footsteps behind him, Bob was so startled that he flinched, but it was only Jo coming towards him in a hurry.

"Bob! Haven't they come back yet? You have to explain to me again exactly what happened. I only understood half of it on the phone."

"Ellis wants to blow up Steve Young's house," Bob said without mincing words, "so he can finally drive him away and get his property."

Jo's eyes snapped open. "You can't be serious!"

"I am," said Bob. "Ricardo is a trained demolition expert and is in possession of large quantities of explosives. That's probably what was in the cargo of the *Elaine*. That's Ricardo's boat that sank in the storm last Wednesday. He and his men have been feverishly searching for it ever since. It was never about the *Eureka* and the gold treasure."

"But they can't just blow up Steve's house!" Jo burst out. "That would send them straight to prison!"

"We don't know exactly how Ellis and Ricardo planned it... but we do know that there's a report that says the ground where Young's house stands is at risk of collapse, except that's probably not true at all. The assessor was paid for that lie."

Bob was still staring out at the water with narrowed eyes. "But all that is not my biggest worry at the moment. It's that no one has come back up yet—neither Jupiter and Pete nor Ricardo and his men. They should have been back up by now! They can't have any air left!"

Jo frowned and stared thoughtfully out to sea. "Yes they can," she said hesitantly. "They can—"

Suddenly, she turned pale and slapped her hand over her mouth. "Bob!" she whispered. "I think I know what Ellis's plan is. Jupiter and Pete have no idea about it, and they are in great danger!"

Almost familiar twilight surrounded Jupiter and Pete as they slid into the depths. At first, the water was so shallow that they clearly felt the pull of the waves. Very soon they were swimming weightlessly over the moonlike underwater landscape of black rock and sand. At some distance from each other, they moved towards the boat, looking around attentively, but there was no sign of Ricardo and his men.

Then the rocking hull of Ellis's boat appeared above their heads. Pete and Jupiter rounded the rope of the anchor in a wide arc.

Then Pete spotted something on the seabed that stood out clearly against the jagged rocks. He beckoned Jupiter to come closer.

It was a small, inconspicuous boat with an outboard motor and an ugly hole in the hull. The name *Elaine* was written in weathered white lettering. There was nothing in the boat. Whatever the *Elaine*'s mysterious cargo might have been, Ricardo and his men had apparently already recovered it. But where were they now?

Jupiter signalled to Pete that they should swim back, this time towards the cliff. Maybe they had missed something. This close to the shore, the water was not very deep. The daylight was sufficient here so they left their underwater lights switched off.

That was why they immediately saw a strange glimmer that suddenly lit up between the rocks. A light danced in the steep face against which the foaming waves crashed above their heads. The glow became brighter.

Jupiter swam to Pete, who was staring fascinated at the glow, tapped him and told him to take cover. Whatever the light was, Jupiter wanted to observe it without being seen himself. A few metres away, a rock rose up that was wide enough to hide behind.

It was not long before the source of the light revealed itself to them. A diver with a lamp in his hand slipped out of an opening in the rock face. He was followed by a second and a third. They recognized Ricardo by his ponytail. The three men swam purposefully back to their boat.

When they were out of sight, Jupiter and Pete left their cover and swam to the opening in the rock. It was the entrance to a cave, and it was about one metre in diameter. From the entrance, it was impossible to estimate how deep the cave reached into the rock.

Pete loosened his lamp from his belt and shone it in, but the light faded after a few metres.

It was extremely risky to explore an underwater cave that they didn't know. What if the equipment got tangled, or they couldn't turn around, or if they lost their bearings, or hurt themselves on a sharp rock edge? However, they had seen three grown men swim out—one of them almost two metres tall—so the cave had to be more spacious than its entrance suggested.

Pete signalled to Jupiter that they should try it, and Jupiter nodded. Pete swam in first. Slowly and carefully he felt his way forward, constantly scanning the rock walls for sharp edges or other obstacles, but there were no major difficulties.

After a few metres, the tunnel bent slightly downwards, then led upwards again—and suddenly Pete pierced the surface of the water. He was in a small natural pool surrounded by rocks. Jupiter appeared next to him. Both of them removed their mouthpieces and took a few deep breaths. The air was amazingly fresh.

"This must be the cave Ricardo was talking about on the answering machine!" Jupiter's voice echoed hollowly off the walls. "It's not completely sealed off, otherwise it would smell very different here. I assume there are fine cracks in the rock walls that extend all the way out." He listened. Indeed, one could hear the waves breaking on the cliff.

They shone both lamps into the cave. The bottom was not much bigger than the pool they were in, which was about three metres across and surrounded by slippery rocks. It widened towards the top before closing like a dome at seven or eight metres. The walls were of wet, uneven rock. One could not leave the seawater pool without climbing.

The beam of Jupiter's lamp fell on a small plastic container that stood at a height of one metre on a narrow stone plateau. "Look, Pete. If I'm not mistaken, that's the *Elaine*'s cargo. Ricardo salvaged it and brought it here with his men. That's why they haven't shown up for so long. Let's see if we're right in our assumption."

They got out of the pool, unstrapped the heavy scuba tanks and took off their fins. Then they climbed to the container. The lid was closed.

“Watertight,” Jupiter said and opened it. The container was empty.

“Jupe, up there!” Pete murmured and pointed towards the cave ceiling. Jupiter shone his light in that direction.

“Wait! Turn off your lamp!” Pete exclaimed, switching off his own. Complete darkness enveloped them—except for a red, pulsating glow that shone somewhere between the rocks above them.

“What is that?” Pete asked.

“Can you climb up?” asked Jupiter.

Pete nodded. “If you shine a light for me.”

While Jupiter directed him with the lamp, Pete carefully made his way up. The walls had many protrusions, indentations and hollows, and the surface was also incredibly smooth and slippery. More than once he slipped and could only barely hold on. As a result, his progress was very slow.

“Be careful!” shouted Jupiter.

Finally Pete had reached the source of the red flashing light. It was a small box that looked like a car battery and had been pushed into a rock niche. Apart from the little red light, there was a thick harness of cables leading out of the box and lost somewhere in the cave wall... and a digital display that showed a time.

No, it was not a time... but a countdown! It was at eight and a half minutes and was counting down incessantly.

Pete followed the cables with his gaze. Finally he managed to trace one cable, and that led to a bundle of sticks that had been taped to the wall just below the cave ceiling with black fabric tape.

Dynamite! At least Pete assumed it was dynamite as it looked just like the ones on television. Not far away, he spotted the second bundle... and the third... and the fourth—all connected by cables.

“Well?” asked Jupiter from below. “What do you see?”

“That you were right with your assumption, and that we have a problem... a huge problem.” Pete shifted his weight and suddenly his right foot slipped away. He groped for a foothold, but his grip came to nothing. His left foot also slipped and, arms rowing, he slid along the jagged rocks into the depths.

“A cave?” asked Bob after Jo had told him about her fear. “They didn’t show up for so long because they were in a cave? Jupiter said that Ricardo’s phone call to Ellis mentioned a cave!”

Jo nodded. “I’ve been inside myself. You can swim in through an underwater tunnel. It’s no secret that it exists, but the cave is still not particularly well-known. It’s a few metres below beach level, and about there.” Jo pointed to the cliff. “Now look up!” Her finger wandered up and pointed to Steve Young’s house perched on the hillside directly above the cave.

Bob turned pale. “If Ricardo blows up the cave, the cliff will indeed collapse... along with Young’s house! It would look like a natural-cause accident, not a blast. And if there is an investigation, Mr Ellis will be there, pointing to his report and saying that he knew it all along. The geotechnical assessor Raya McCreary will confirm everything.”

“There!” Jo suddenly shouted, pointing to the water. “Someone is surfacing!”

But it was not Jupiter and Pete, but Ricardo and his men. Their heads had appeared near the moored boat and now they climbed aboard one after the other. Bob watched them through the binoculars.

"They don't have anything with them. That means they really did leave the explosives in the cave. Where are Jupiter and Pete?"

"Still down there," Jo said sombrely. She pointed to Young's house above them. "You have to warn Steve. He has to leave his house, now!"

"But what about—"

"I'll take care of your friends," Jo promised. "I'll find the cave right away. The entrance is not very deep below sea level, I can dive without equipment. You warn Steve, quick!"

Bob was not comfortable with it, but Jo was right, they had to act immediately! He sprinted off, ran up the beach to the stairs and hurried up. Then he ran along the edge of the car park to its end, around a barrier, through the wild grasslands—where Young's warning signs were everywhere—and finally reaching the house.

Standing outside the door were Steve Young and, to Bob's great surprise, Eric Ellis. Young had his arms folded while Ellis talked to him. Bob was completely out of breath when he finally came up in front of them.

"Bob," Young said in surprise. "What are you doing—"

"You have to get out of here," Bob gasped, propping his hands on his thighs. "Now!"

"Excuse me?"

"Your house... is not safe. It could all slide down in a moment."

"Now don't you start on that!" Steve Young was indignant. "Ellis has been getting on my nerves with this nonsense for days. This house has been here for a hundred years and will be here for another hundred more—"

"You have to go now!" shouted Bob as loud as he could.

"I don't know what's got into the boy," Mr Ellis claimed, casting a quick glance at his watch, "but please accept my invitation. We'll go have a coffee now and talk things over again." Ellis was already half turning to go. "Well, come on!"

"Come on?" Young mimicked the man. "I'm not your dog! I don't know what's going on here. All I know is that I have to work and besides, I don't feel like having coffee with you. I'm staying here."

Young's gaze slid past the two of them towards the car park. "What's going on there?"

Bob turned around. Three police cars had pulled into the car park. Police officers got out and rushed to the beach staircase.

"I can tell you what's going on, Mr Young," Bob said. "Mr Ellis is about to blow up your house—or rather, the cliff that lies beneath your house. He's trying to lure you away with an invitation for coffee to save your life, perhaps to do him honour, but he's still a homicidal maniac."

"Ha!" Ellis laughed out loud. "You've got to be kidding!" But he did not look amused. Again he glanced quickly at his watch.

"You know when the blasting will take place!" Bob burst out. "You set up a time with Ricardo. So when is it, Mr Ellis?"

Eric Ellis stared at him in disbelief.

Bob grabbed him by the shoulders and shook him. "When?"

## 17. Well Hidden in the Depths

“Ouch!” Pete’s cry of pain echoed unreal off the walls of the cave. “Ouch, it hurts... it hurts bad, Jupe!”

The Second Investigator had lost his footing and fallen. He had knocked Jupiter over and they had both landed in the pool of water. When Pete had tried to push himself to get back up, a sharp pain had shot through his left foot. It was with great difficulty that he had reached the surface again.

“What happened to you?” asked Jupiter fearfully.

“My foot! I hurt myself!”

“Just your foot?”

“I think so... but it hurts a lot!”

“See if you can climb out of the pool!”

Pete gritted his teeth in pain, but with Jupiter’s help he finally made it onto the flattest rock. He examined his foot. The skin was scraped all over, but that was not all. As soon as he tried to move his foot, a burning pain shot through him again.

“I sprained my foot,” he groaned. Then he told Jupiter what he had found under the cave ceiling.

“How much time do we have?”

“Eight and a half minutes then... now probably only six or seven.”

Jupe looked up. “I can’t climb up there. I can’t do it.”

“I know. We have to get out of here, Jupe.”

“Can you manage that?”

“I have no choice.”

“Hurry up then!”

Jupiter helped his friend to put on the scuba tank. He left the left fin there.

“Can you swim?”

“You go first,” Pete said. “I’ll hold on to your belt and let you pull me. Then I don’t have to move my foot much.”

Jupiter nodded. “We’ll manage.” He pressed his diving mask to his face, put the regulator mouthpiece in his mouth and let himself sink into the water.

Under water, Jupiter waited until he felt Pete holding on to his belt. Then he swam forward, very carefully flapping his legs.

They were very slow and Jupiter felt as if he could hear the countdown ticking in his head.

When they were already halfway through the tunnel, there was a sudden jolt, and Pete’s hand let go of Jupe’s belt. What had happened? Jupiter tried to turn, but the tunnel was so narrow at this point that it was impossible to do so. He waited a moment, but Pete seemed to have disappeared.

Jupiter panicked. He had to get out of this tunnel quickly, but at the same time he couldn’t leave Pete behind! What should he do?

Immediately, he decided to swim out first, quickly turn, and then swim back in the other way around to look for Pete.

Very soon, he saw the tunnel exit! Once he was outside, he saw a figure suddenly coming towards him. It was Jo! She was swimming under water without equipment. Jupiter gave her hand signals and tried to make her understand that Pete was in trouble. She understood immediately and quickly swam past him into the tunnel.

Jupiter shone his light at her from outside. There was Pete! He seemed disoriented. Fortunately, Jo reached him very quickly. She immediately drew up her legs, clasped them, and made a half-turn to be in the supine position. Then she grabbed Pete's hand, and led him swimming backwards out of the tunnel.

As soon as they were outside, Jo signalled to Jupiter. He understood and handed her his alternative air supply, from which she immediately took a few deep breaths. Then they swam away from the cave and surfaced.

They had not been up there a second when a wave came and pushed them with all its might towards the rocks.

"We have to leave immediately!" shouted Jupiter. "The cliff is going to collapse—"

"I know," Jo interrupted him, gasping. "How long?"

"Three minutes, maybe. Pete, are you okay?"

The Second Investigator looked dazed. "I had hit my head and let go of you. Then all of a sudden I didn't know where I was... but I'm okay now. I just can't swim."

"Then hold on to us!" shouted Jo.

Pete put his hands on Jupiter's right and Jo's left shoulder and together they pulled him away from the rock wall against the force of the waves. It seemed as if they could hardly move, but when Jupiter dared to glance back, they had made twenty metres.

Suddenly there was an incredible boom and a crash as if the earth was breaking in two. A tremor ran through the water, they felt a shock wave in the pit of their stomachs—and the cliff slid into the sea in a huge avalanche of rocks.

The boom made everyone freeze. Eric Ellis, Bob and Steve Young looked at each other. Then a crack burst open in the ground, as if from nowhere, as if the earth beneath them was a piece of cracker biscuit that someone had just broken through. There was another boom as the wall of Young's house burst apart.

Bob grabbed Young by the arm and pulled him along. Ellis ran alongside them.

They had only taken a few steps back when the ground they had just been standing on slipped and simply disappeared into the depths... and with it, half of Steve Young's house. It sounded like the world was ending. Paper caught in the wind flew through the air from the broken house like feathers from a burst pillow. Along with it, the colourful smoke from Young's chemicals bubbled around. Five metres of cliff had fallen over a length of about twenty metres... simply gone, as if they had never been there.

"I told you it wasn't safe for you to live here!" said Mr Ellis suddenly, "but you didn't want to—"

Eric Ellis didn't finish that sentence, because Steve Young turned around and punched Ellis in the chin so hard that he went down like a felled tree and didn't move.

Then Steve Young ran towards the edge of the cliff as if hypnotized.

"Mr Young!" shouted Bob. "Careful, there might be more sliding off!"

But Young didn't seem to hear him at all. He stepped very close to the abyss and stared into half of his house and then into the depths.

"Gold," he said. "Gold coins!"

Bob had no idea what Young was talking about as he was probably in shock. However, Bob had to get him away from the edge. With a queasy feeling in his stomach, he carefully approached Young, gently grabbed him by the upper arm and wanted to pull him away.

However, Young resisted. “Look!” he said, forcing Bob to look down.

Now Bob saw what Young meant—from a hole half a metre below the house, gold coins trickled down into the depths like water from a spring.

“The treasure was hidden under my house!” whispered Young.

Then Bob remembered the librarian’s words when she told him what Geoffrey Young had said about the treasure shortly before his death: ‘The gold is well hidden in the depths.’

Jupiter, Pete and Jo were lucky in their misfortune. The wave caused by the falling rock masses literally pushed them away from the danger. Very soon, they managed to swim back to the beach at a sufficient distance from the cliff. There they were already awaited by the police... and by Bob, who fell into his friends’ arms with relief.

The story was quickly told, and Mr Ellis was arrested the moment he awoke from unconsciousness. Immediately after that, The Three Investigators were sent to a clinic to get treatment for Pete’s foot. Fortunately it was only lightly sprained.

A few hours later, The Three Investigators were back at the police station to complete reporting the case. There, they learned that Ricardo Yarbrough and his two henchmen were caught by the Eureka police as they attempted to flee. Meanwhile, the police had also contacted Barks & McCreary to begin an investigation into the alleged involvement of Raya McCreary.

Finally, after all the reporting was completed, it was already dark. Bob drove them in Pete’s car back to their holiday cottage. All the excitement and the short nights had made them dog-tired. They went straight to bed and slept for twelve hours straight.

## 18. The Gold Rush Ends

The next day, the reporters had returned to Sandfield. The collapsed cliff and the real treasure of Geoffrey Young were a sensation. The treasure hunters were also back, but the police had put up a barricade to stop people from diving for gold coins at the break-off cliff—not only to protect the gold, but also the divers themselves because no one knew if more rocks and debris would slide off.

The Three Investigators sat on a secluded bench in the dunes, from which they had a perfect view of the police, reporters, treasure hunters and onlookers, and watched the goings-on. Pete had piled up a small mountain of sand on which he could lay his injured foot.

Now Jo also joined them. She had been at her boat rental shop and had made a flask of tea, which she now brought with her on a tray with four cups. She sat down with the boys on the bench and warmed her fingers on a hot cup.

“You know what I wonder?” said Jupiter. “Why did the *Elaine* actually sink? Why did Ricardo even take the boat out that far on that stormy night when the entrance to the cave is so close to the beach? He wouldn’t have needed the boat at all.”

“I can answer that, Jupiter,” Jo said. “I heard an interview with the police spokesman on the radio. They said it was a precautionary measure. Ricardo didn’t want to be seen on the beach, otherwise a connection could easily have been made between a falling cliff and a diver who had gone into the water earlier in miserable weather and with a mysterious cargo under his arm. So he set off from the harbour at night. It’s a relatively short distance from the harbour to the cave, so he wasn’t worried about the storm. However, that went very wrong because he didn’t realize the dangers around Africa Rock. But yesterday, he didn’t care. There was no one on the beach to notice him, so he just wanted to get the job over with as quickly as possible and get out of there.”

Jupiter nodded. “So that’s settled then.”

“There’s something else I didn’t understand,” Bob confessed. “Why was Steve Young so convinced all this time that the conversation he overheard between Ellis and Ricardo was about the *Eureka*, his great-uncle’s ship? After all, it wasn’t true at all, it was about the *Elaine*.”

“I can tell you that!” growled a rough voice and suddenly Steve Young stepped out from behind a dune.

“Steve!” cried Jo in surprise. “Have you been eavesdropping?”

Young did not think it was necessary to answer this question. “Ricardo’s divers are both from Eureka—” he said instead, “—the city of Eureka! That’s what they told me at the police station. When I overheard Ellis and Ricardo, that’s when Ricardo said he needed help to find the wreck, and suggested his friends from Eureka. Well, and I just heard ‘Eureka’ and... got it a little wrong, I guess.”

“Oh, that’s how it was,” Pete said, swallowing a sneer. With Steve Young, he preferred to be reserved.

“What about the gold?” Bob dared to ask. “It’s in the sea now, and if it’s recovered, then —”



“They say I’m not entitled to the gold,” Young said angrily, “but I would be paid compensation in the amount I need to rebuild my house a distance back on safe ground. How generous!” He spat into the sand. But then, to the surprise of The Three Investigators, he suddenly laughed. “How fortunate that I have taken precautions!”

“Precautions?” asked Jupiter suspiciously.

“I’ve already stashed some away,” Young murmured, “in case they change their minds about compensation. After all, it’s my treasure!”

“Stashed?” asked Pete. “Did you dive for the coins?”

“No, climbed! Last night—on the edge of the collapsed ground. There were still a few handfuls of gold coins in the hole under my house that hadn’t fallen out. I had to hurry because I knew they were going to shut it all off today... and that’s what they did.”

“You climbed down there?” cried Bob. “But that was life-threatening!”

Young waved it off. “Oh, come on! Are you telling me that I need a climbing licence for that? The soft-flushed youth of today! Whatever happened to your guts?”

Pete burst out: “Excuse me?” he shouted. “Are you still in your right mind? We put our lives on the line to find your stupid treasure! We fought sharks and harpoon divers, we broke our feet, and almost got blown up, and—”

Young suddenly pulled his hand out of his coat pocket and flicked something at Pete. The Second Investigator caught it. It was a gold coin. Jupiter, Bob and Jo also got one thrown to them.

Pete said nothing more.

Steve Young winked at them and then a miracle happened—he smiled! “Thank you for your help,” he said, turned and disappeared behind the dune.

At that moment, for the first time in weeks, the sun broke through the clouds and made the gold coin in their hands sparkle.